

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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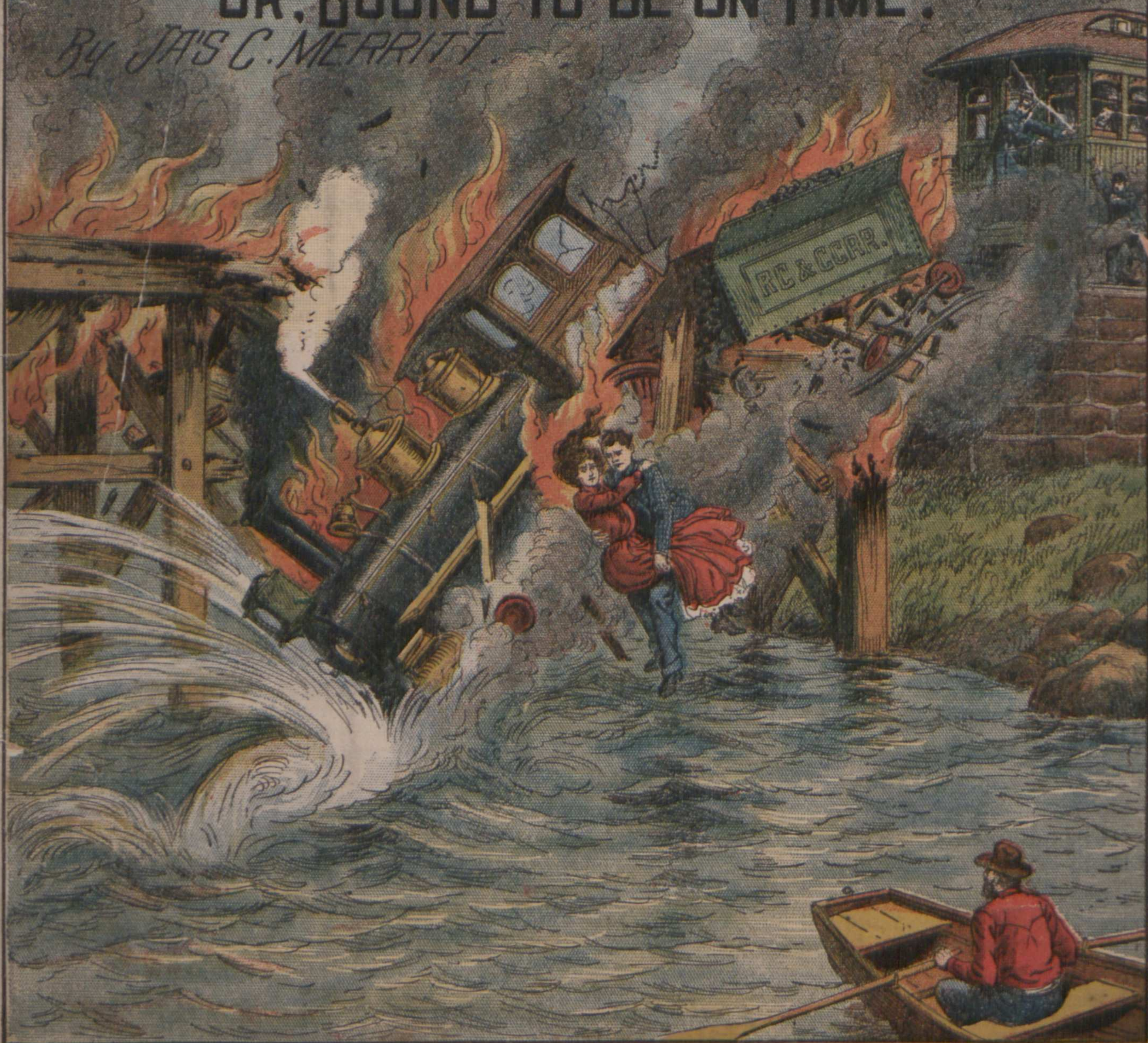
No. 283.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 4, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

SIXTY MILE SAM; OR, BOUND TO BE ON TIME.

By JAS C. MERRITT.



Nellie Borden gave a wild scream and sprang into Sam's arms. Ben Dodge stuck with heroism to his post. One moment the flames overwhelmed the locomotive, blistering the flesh of the occupants, then there was a tremendous rush of waters.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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CHAPTER I.

THE AUTOCRAT OF VULTURE PASS.

It was remarked at the time of its construction by people who pretended to know that no greater act of folly had ever been perpetrated than the building of the Red Creek and Cliff City Railroad.

It was in the wildest part of Texas, and the Star Route mail stages had been deemed sufficient for all the transportation needs of the unsettled section for half a century to come.

But Oscar Borden, fifty times a millionaire and railroad man, was a strategic and skilled speculator.

There were deep reasons hidden to the world why he saw fit to expend ten millions of money in the equipment of one of the finest railroad branches in the far West for its length.

Nobody else saw as he did that two of the Great Trunk lines of Texas and Mexico here avoided a tract of country so immensely wealthy in minerals and natural agricultural resources, that the day was right at hand when they must call upon it for products. It was, in fact, the key to a mighty mine of treasure which he fastened his grip upon when he built the Red Creek Road.

What, though it was running at a loss these few first years of its life? The tide was sure to turn, and when it did with an overwhelming current of success.

Thus Oscar Borden reasoned and not without sense. Thus men make millions while less far-seeing ones stand by inactive and see the chances slip from their grasp.

Borden knew that the Texas Central could only communicate with inner New Mexico, through the great pass which the Red Creek road had taken. In a few short years Oscar Borden could assume the reins as dictator of all this vast import and export.

The road had been laid its length of one hundred and fifty miles not without some outlay of expense and hard labor.

But a new and startling contingency had arisen. At first Borden had attached but little significance to it, but now it had assumed most threatening proportions.

One day in his office at Red Creek he had received the fol-

lowing message scrawled in characters of blood upon a sheet of birch bark, a most unique missive:

"Mister Borden:—I know as how you've got more nor your lawful share of this world's goods. Now I never rob a poor man. But I mean to rob you on sight fer you can stand it. Now, my terms are thirty thousand dollars in good, round gold eagles, or I'll smash every train you send into Vulture Pass. These hills are mine, and the old stage line had to pay me tribute fer using the Pass, an' there's no reason why you shouldn't do the same. Drop a mail sack with your answer in the Pass from the next mail train. Don't fail on your deadly peril. I am

"RED FAWKES."

Oscar Borden read the strange epistle through with the keenest of amazement. In all his life he had never seen the equal of this for cool assurance.

He smiled cynically.

Not for a moment did he consider the fact that this man was the most lawless desperado in that part of the world. That he actually had it in his power to do much harm to the Red Creek Railroad.

Intrenched as he was in those invulnerable hills, he could not be easily routed out and could almost hold an army at bay.

"Thirty thousand dollars," muttered Oscar Borden. "Does the fellow think I am an idiot? But I'll send him an answer, though. Yes, and one that will open his eyes."

The railway magnate called in the boss section man of that part of the road and gave him a huge placard upon which he had caused to be written the following:

"To Red Fawkes, so-called, and all other scoundrels of like sort: If any harm or mischief is done to the roadbed or rolling stock of the Red Creek Railroad, take FAIR WARNING! Such person or persons shall be held criminally liable by the law, even if Judge Lynch has to be consulted. FAIR NOTICE! TAKE WARNING! By order of the President of the Red Creek Railroad.

"Signed,

OSCAR BORDEN"

"There, Markham," said President Borden, coolly. "Take that down to Vulture Pass and post it on the cliff wall. I think it will have a good effect."

The boss of the section read the bill with staring eyes. Then he stood a moment irresolute.

"Well?" asked the magnate. "What have you to say?"

"Really—I—yes, sir," stammered the man. "But would ye do this thing, sir?"

"Why not?" asked Borden, irritably.

Do ye know this man Fawkes? He is a bad fellow, sir. He has over a hundred armed men at his back, and he'll do just what he says, sir."

"Confound it! Is there no law in this country?" stormed the magnate. "Am I to pay tribute on this free soil? Never! Not if I had to raise an army and exterminate the lawless gang. Post the bill as I say, sir."

The order was obeyed.

The second day thereafter a startling report reached Red Creek, which threw the town into a state of fearful excitement.

The twelve o'clock mail had been held up at Vulture Pass. A barricade across the track forced the engineer to stop his train.

Then armed men wearing black masks had boarded the train. A terrific fight had followed, in which the engineer and the express messenger had been killed and others badly wounded.

Fifteen thousand dollars in money in the iron safe of the express company had been taken. The money was on its way to Cliff City to pay off railroad employes there.

The effect of this upon Oscar Borden was beyond description. He could hardly credit the report.

At first he stormed up and down his office excitedly. Then he went home in a state of great mental excitement.

The only living relative Oscar Borden had in the world was his daughter, Nellie Borden, a sweet and beautiful young girl of eighteen.

He strove to comfort her father in every way and allay his mental sufferings.

"Perhaps you can compromise with the chief of the outlaws, father," she ventured to say.

"Compromise? Never!" roared the magnate, furiously. "I will have the scoundrel lynched. He shall pay for it with his life! Such wretches are better out of the world than in it, anyhow."

But the worst had not yet come. It was not many days after this before every engineer on the road received a small slip of birch bark upon which was written in blood with a skull and cross-bones above:

"Beware! You are marked to die if you remain longer in the employ of the Red Creek Railroad. Leave it at once if you would live."

"RED FAWKES."

As a result a panic was created. The magnate went to his office to find every train sidetracked and the office filled with the terrified locomotive drivers.

In vain he expostulated and tried to get them to return to their duties. The risk was too powerful and the terrorism had gained too strong a foothold.

"But I shall be a ruined man," he cried in despair. "The noon express must go at all hazards. It carries the government mails and they must not fail."

"You see how it is, sir," said one of the men respectfully. "We all value our lives to a certain extent. It would be almost suicide to go down through that Pass with a train in face of that warning. Not but what we feel sorry enough for you, sir, but we don't want to suicide."

"If you would only send a band of vigilantes down there

to rout out Fawkes it might be safe to go on again," said another.

But Borden would not listen to these explanations. He flared into towering rage.

"I tell you that noon express must go out," he cried, earnestly. "One hundred dollars to the man who will take it safely through."

There was silence in the room. No one ventured to accept the offer.

"I will make it two hundred. Now will any one dare accept it?" cried the magnate.

There was a slight movement in the crowd, and a somewhat slender yet compactly built youth, with handsome features and curling chestnut hair, stepped forward.

He seemed a mere boy in years, yet his voice had the ring of a man as he said, boldly and decisively:

"If you will allow me, sir, I will take that train down Cliff City, and I don't want any pay for it, either."

The magnate gazed at the youth in doubtful surprise.

"You?" he exclaimed in surprise. "Are you an engineer? Why, you are only a boy."

"I am older in experience than in years," replied the youth with flushed face. "You need have no fear, sir, I can prove to you that that I can run a locomotive."

"What is your name?"

"I am Sam Prentiss, sir, and a newcomer in these parts. In Chester, Pennsylvania, where is my home, I am known as Sixty Mile Sam."

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Borden, with an intense interest, "that is a singular cognomen. Why did they call you that?"

"Because I was considered the fastest and safest driver they had in that part of the country. I could so accurately gauge the speed of my locomotive as to keep up the average speed of sixty miles per hour."

Sam Prentiss spoke modestly but plainly. There was no reason to doubt his earnestness or truthfulness. At once Mr. Borden's manner changed and he ejaculated:

"Of course you are a stranger to me, but——"

"I have my testimonials, sir."

Sam drew the papers from his pocket and handed them to Mr. Borden. The latter glanced at them and exclaimed with deep gratification:

"Why, I have certainly reason to congratulate you. They are signed by the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad."

"Are you satisfied, sir?" asked the young engineer.

"Entirely! If you take that train through safely I will pay you well."

"No, sir," said Sam, resolutely. "Remember I am not taking this train through for compensation. I should, however, like to secure a permanent position with you as engineer."

"You shall have it," cried Mr. Borden, consulting his watch. "But come! You have hardly time to make up your train. You had better start at once."

"I am ready," cried Sam, throwing off his coat.

They walked out upon the platform. All the business men of the town were present, and, as the report of Sam's plucky offer had been spread about, he was received with a rousing cheer.

The young engineer from the East lifted his cap modestly and said:

"You are premature, gentlemen. Wait until I have achieved the feat. I may fail, but it will be at the expense of my life, I assure you."

CHAPTER II.

A BRAVE DEED.

The crowd was caught and completely carried away with the modest demeanor and noble bearing of Sam Prentiss. He

was the cynosure of all eyes and the word went from lip to lip.

"He was born to succeed. He will not fail. You can see it in him."

"Now, Mr. Prentiss," said Mr. Borden at this moment. "What do you require in the manner of equipments for defense in case of an attack?"

"Give me a good man for a mate," said Sam, quietly. "Four good Winchester rifles in the cab. Give me a dozen armed men in the express car and let it be placed at the rear of the train. This will divide the gang. They will have to attack both ends at once."

"It shall be as you say," cried the magnate, rubbing his hands.

Volunteers were called for.

There were men of the right stamp, who belonged to the vigilantes of Red Creek who were ready to go.

The mail car was barricaded, and good preparations made for defense.

The cab was closed up on both sides so that shots could not penetrate it and neither could the attacking party easily climb into it.

Then twenty men with picks, and shovels, and iron spikes, and hammers, were placed in one of the passenger coaches.

Passengers were at a premium, only half a dozen, venturing to assume the risk.

This made the train all in readiness, and the word was given to start.

Sam's mate was a powerful fellow named Ben Dodge. The young engineer saw at a glance that he was a man of pluck and would stand by the engine to the last.

Sixty Mile Sam waved adieu to the cheering crowd and then opened the throttle.

The locomotive, one of the best on the line, started with a gliding motion which showed the touch of a skilled hand in the cab.

Out upon the rails the train shot and soon was speeding with the wings of the wind toward Vulture Pass.

Only thirty miles to cover, and Sixty Mile Sam to keep up his reputation must make them in thirty minutes.

But the Red Creek Railroad had a straight course and an excellent roadbed, so that there was no doubt but that he would succeed.

Faster and faster went the express, now topping a grade with mighty momentum, now thundering down grade at a terrific rate of speed.

But the master hand at the throttle held the train so steady that the ordinary passenger would never have suspected that he was flying at the rate of sixty miles per hour.

Sam Prentiss was never so thoroughly in his element as when seated at the cab window, holding the iron horse to his work.

He formed a handsome picture as he sat there, looking every inch the iron steed's master.

The fireman, Ben Dodge, gazed at him with admiration and something akin to awe.

"By Jupiter!" he muttered under his breath, "I never fired with a man before who could handle a locomotive like this chap. I reckon he was born to it."

Mile after mile was spun off in the same dizzy fashion.

Now Sixty Mile Sam turned to his grimy mate, and, with shining eyes and a manner of excitement, said:

"Look here, mate. Is not that the Pass straight ahead?"

Dodge glanced out of the forward window and saw a mighty range of hills before them.

They seemed cleft by a mighty cut and high steps of granite rose upon either side to a dizzy height. The train was thundering down into the cut.

"Yes," cried Ben Dodge, with great excitement on his part. "That is it, pard. Look out for squalls."

Something like a confident smile wreathed the lips of the young engineer. He arose from his seat and leaned a little further out of the cab window.

His keen eye swept the track ahead. He could almost have detected a misplaced rail or detached spike, so accustomed was he to the vigilant scrutiny.

His hand was upon the throttle valve and his supple form was in readiness for action.

Now they were in the Pass.

Upon either side, hundreds of feet high, rose the dizzy heights of rock, trap-like in its character.

A short curve was just ahead.

At that moment something crashed through the framework of the cab window just above the young engineer's head.

It was a bullet.

Another and another came. The glass windows was smashed, furrows were ploughed in the wood-work of the cab ceiling, but the young engineer did not budge.

He was as cool as could be, and never once removed his gaze from the track.

The storm of bullets had no terror for him. He seemed to bear a charmed life, for they all missed him.

Now the curve was at hand.

Swift as a flash Sixty Mile Sam closed the throttle valve and threw back the lever. Then the whistle broke upon the air of the gorge:

"Down brakes!"

Every man had been at his post waiting for that expected signal. So easily and skillfully did Sixty Mile Sam bring the train to a standstill that it stopped not twenty feet from the barricade of earth and stones which opposed its progress.

The train could go no further. The critical moment had come.

In a moment the gorge was filled with armed and masked men. Bullets were flying like a storm of hail.

The passengers had crouched for safety in the bottom of the cars. The vigilantes were hotly returning the fire of the outlaws.

A rush was made for the locomotive cab by a dozen of the outlaws.

But Sixty Mile Sam was ready.

He and Dodge had their Winchesters in readiness, and opened fire at short range. As fast as the repeating rifles could be worked they poured a storm of bullets into the midst of the masked gang.

The result was that they were held at bay.

Not one of them succeeded in boarding the locomotive. The battle at the rear of the train, though, was terrific.

A vast force of the outlaws were there concentrated, and they seemed determined to raid the car.

Red Fawkes himself, conspicuous in a red shirt, could be seen urging the outlaws on.

They swarmed about the car like bees. With axes and bars they tried to break open the car doors.

The vigilantes fought like demons, but the outlaws would doubtless have been successful if it had not been for a shrewd move upon Sam's part.

The young engineer, at risk of his life, put his head out of the cab window and glanced at the rear of the train.

He saw the situation at a glance. The outlaws were dead sure to gain the victory if something was not done at once.

"There is too much fighting up that way," he cried, turning to Ben Dodge. "We must take a part in it."

This was easy enough to say, but one might ask, how could it be done?

To leave the cab and go to the help of the beleaguered ones in the mail car would be to go to death.

But Sixty Mile Sam was ever fertile in expedients. It did not take him long to decide what to do.

He opened the throttle and reversed the engine. The train suddenly moved backwards.

Many of the outlaws were thrown from the car, some fell under the wheels and the attack was arrested.

Sam shoved the train back its full length. The move had a marvelous effect.

It had arrested the strife at its most critical point and completely turned the tide of battle.

Those in the car were given a chance to recuperate and reload. When the train came to halt again the outlaws once more rushed upon the mail car.

But Sam and Ben Dodge got in a few shots here with telling effect.

With the few moments' respite the defenders of the mail car fought with renewed energy.

The result was that this time the outlaws were held at bay and Red Fawkes was unable to urge them forward.

A wild cheer went up from those on the train.

Slowly but surely the outlaws were driven back. The fire from the mail car was most destructive.

Reluctantly the foe retired.

The gap was literally strewn with dead bodies. The battle had been a terribly fatal one for Red Fawkes' gang.

Fully a score of their number were left wounded or dead behind. Only two of the vigilantes were killed.

Red Fawkes, who saw that the battle was lost, had the prudence and good sense to withdraw his men. With baffled yells they vanished in the fastnesses of the hills.

Then the doors of the mail car opened and the victorious vigilantes emerged.

They drew up in line and gave a rousing cheer. But little time, however, was wasted.

The laborers came out instantly with their picks and shovels and began work on the obstructions.

In less than an hour the track was clear once more. The outlaws were not in sight.

The question now arose: What was to be done with the dead and wounded? Graves were dug in the defile for the dead, and the half dozen wounded were placed in the baggage car to be taken to Cliff City.

Then the cry went along the line:

"All aboard!"

The conductor pulled the bell-cord. Sam Prentiss accepted the signal, opened the throttle, and the train was once more quickly under way.

Thundering on her way through Vulture Pass, the express finally emerged into the open country. It was now a pretty run, with only four stops, into Cliff City.

Sam maintained his sixty-mile reputation and held the train at that speed until she finally thundered into Cliff City.

The citizens of that place were congregated en masse about the depot. The safe arrival of the train was greeted with tremendous cheering.

The departure of the train from Red Creek and the circumstances had been learned in Cliff City by telegraph. There were many who had predicted that the train would not get through that day.

For an hour the station had been crowded with the anxiously awaiting crowd. The appearance of the bullet-riddled cars and shattered engine was the signal for most tremendous excitement.

Everybody crowded about the engine cab and demanded a speech from Sixty Mile Sam.

The young engineer was truly the hero of the hour. He modestly bowed his acknowledgments of the honor done him, and said:

"My dear friends, I thank you one and all. I fear that you

are giving me more credit than I deserve. 'I have only been executing my simple duty.'"

The applause was deafening. But in the meanwhile word had been telegraphed to Mr. Borden in Red Creek of the safe arrival of the express.

As a result, the operator now came along to the cab and extended a sheet of paper to Sam. It was a telegraph blank, and upon it was written:

"Sixty Mile Sam:—Accept my congratulations and thanks. The whole city awaits your return to give you a testimonial of their gratitude for defeating Red Fawkes.

"OSCAR BORDEN."

Sam felt a trifle dizzy when he read that message.

"Whew!" he muttered, "I'm getting into a hot stew. Is this the way people in the West have of doing things? I don't think I deserve so much honor as this."

"Yes, you do, old pard!" cried Ben Dodge, seizing his hand. "But for you the train would not have left Red Creek today. Was it not you who planned and executed the whole thing? To whom does the credit belong?"

There were tears of pleasure in the young engineer's eyes but he never once lost his most admirable self-possession.

He quietly got down from the cab and proceeded to oil up the bearings of the iron horse. While thus engaged the train dispatcher's message came for the return.

Sam ran the locomotive to the turning-table, then back to the main track, and this time placed the mail car next to the engine.

Passengers were plentiful on this trip and the train was loaded.

Yet all precautions were observed, for it was not uncertain that the outlaws would not make a second attack upon the train.

Leaving Cliff City, the express was soon thundering upon its return to Red Creek.

The afternoon had waned and evening had come. The golden sunset had faded, and the silver moon hung high in the beautiful blue ether overhead.

The train thundered on, and now the black heights of Vulture Pass loomed up dark and forbidding.

Only the headlight of the locomotive could be depended upon in those depths. The next moment the train had flashed into the inky blackness. It was for all the world like entering the mouth of a Hades with fearful uncertainties attendant.

CHAPTER III.

A MURDEROUS DEED.

Even Sixty Mile Sam, the intrepid young engineer, felt a bit nervous when the train entered those black depths.

It was by no means uncertain that the outlaws might not make preparations for another attack upon the train. Night would favor such an act.

The headlight threw its rays down the track, and Sam looked for an obstruction.

He was obliged to slow up to a great extent or incur the awful risk of a smash-up. While brave as lion, Sixty Mile Sam was by no means reckless.

But the cunning Red Fawkes had for some good reason seen fit not to make the second attack, and the train passed through Vulture Pass in safety.

Once more out of the horrid black depths, Sam, with a thrill of pleasure hardly to be expressed in words, opened wide the throttle and let the locomotive fly.

Small stations, signal lights, houses by the way, deep cuts, high trestles, all flashed by in a twinkling.

It was all a thrilling panorama in the blackness, and might have impressed deeply one not accustomed to it. But Sam, deeply absorbed in other matters, passed it all by heedlessly.

Now the lights of Red Creek hove in sight. Sam opened the whistle valve and sent out upon the night air triumphant shriek after shriek, which aroused the whole city.

Every switch was open to the handsome depot, and the train rolled up to the platform so densely crowded and stopped with an imperceptibility of that inevitable jerk which characterizes the careless engineer.

Then such a scene as followed.

The crowd wildly cheering thronged about the engine cab. It would have been useless for Sixty Mile Sam to expostulate.

He was taken upon the shoulders of the excited and applauding crowd, and indeed the manifestations of gratitude were too profuse to suit the retiring disposition of Sam Prentiss.

Finally, seeing his embarrassment and almost distress, Mr. Borden came to his rescue, and carried him off to his private office.

"Really, sir!" said Sam as he sank exhausted into a chair. "This is most incomprehensible to me. Is this the way you Westerners do? Why, I have done nothing extraordinary. I fear if this continues I shall have to skip out of this section and go back home."

"Young man," said Mr. Borden, solemnly, "these Westerners, as you call them, are only Easterners transplanted. But they would be ungrateful indeed if they did not show recognition of the great favor you have done them."

"You do not realize what it means to the people of this section to administer such a defeat to such a demagogue as this Red Fawkes. Why, I think the man who would wipe out that wretch and his gang would be immortalized."

"Whew!" exclaimed Sam in amazement. "It ought not to be such a hard job. Besides, you should give credit to others as well as me."

"Ah, but you planned the battle and had the generalship to carry it out. Now, in a modest way, and understand me, merely as a token of my recognition of your great service, I beg that you will accept this."

Mr. Borden placed upon the desk a check. The figures indicated that it was drawn for the sum of five hundred dollars.

Sixty Mile Sam instantly arose, and his face was scarlet.

"Really, Mr. Borden," he said in a dignified manner, "I must decline any such a thing. While I acknowledge your kindly motive, I cannot accept the check."

"What?" exclaimed the magnate in amazement. "You decline it?"

"I do."

"But—perhaps you will explain."

"Certainly, sir. I do not consider that I have earned it——"

"But I do!"

"Pardon me, sir, but do not press this matter," said Sam, resolutely. "For reasons I do not care to express I cannot accept the check."

"Very well," exclaimed Mr. Borden, in an injured manner. "Perhaps it is not large enough."

He regretted the words the next instant. The expression of positive pain upon Sam's face checked him.

"Forgive me, Sam!" he said, instantly. "I retract those words. It shall be as you say. But you will at least accept my thanks."

"With pleasure, sir," replied Sam, quietly. "If—if you really consider the favor worth requiting, you might give me a berth as engineer——"

"Give you a berth as engineer," cried Mr. Borden. "Well, I should say I would. Yes, and at double pay. Will you report right off, Sam?"

"This very moment, sir," replied the young engineer, promptly.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Borden. "You may take the noon express, Sam, the same train you took out today. That will give you your nights and mornings to yourself. But it is now past the hour of nine, and I think I will go home. Will you not come up and spend the night with me? I would like to talk with you, my boy. I am very much interested in you."

"You are very kind, sir," said Sam, modestly. "But I am not dressed in my best."

"That matters not," cried Mr. Borden, eagerly. "There will be no one at the house but my daughter Nellie. Please oblige me, Sam."

Sam hesitated. He thought of his humble room in the lodging house on a back street in the town. It would be quite a transition to the elegant home of the millionaire. Yet Mr. Borden was so eager to have him accompany him that he would not refuse.

"I will accept your kind offer," he said, briefly.

A few moments later they were seated in the millionaire's carriage and being whirled away to his elegant residence.

Arrived there, Mr. Borden at once led the way into the library. He indicated a seat for Sam before a cheerful grate fire, and himself sat in an armchair near a low window, the curtains of which were partly drawn.

"Now, Sam," said Mr. Borden, when they were cozily settled down, "I do not wish to keep you up to a late hour, but I had a purpose in inviting you here tonight."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Sam, in amazement. "What may it be, sir?"

"Well, I will be brief. Are your parents living, Sam?"

"No, sir; they are both dead. My father died six years ago of heart failure, and my mother followed him a year later. I have shifted for myself ever since."

"Ah! did your father leave anything?"

"He left us penniless, sir, save for the worthless deed of a tract of land in this very region."

Mr. Borden gave a start.

"The deed of a tract of land!" he exclaimed. "Have you it with you?"

"No."

"Sam," said Mr. Borden, fixing a peculiar gaze upon him, "was not your father's given name Christopher?"

"It was, sir," replied Sam, in deep surprise.

"I thought so. Was not his early life passed in Philadelphia?"

"It was, sir!" cried Sam, eagerly. "Oh, did you know my father?"

"Know him!" cried Mr. Borden. "I should say I did. He was my schoolmate years ago. We were the best of friends. So you are Kit Prentiss' boy? Sam, you shall never want a friend while I live."

"Thank you, sir," cried the young engineer, with pleasure. "I am so glad to meet an old friend of my father's."

"Your father once did me a great favor. Now let me tell you about that land of which he has left you a deed. It is the title to a gold mine in the Vulture Hills, and in a region over which Red Fawkes holds sway. The outlaw works it secretly, I am told. That deed I transferred to your father twenty years ago. You will find my name on its margin. Sam, you cannot know what pleasure it will give me if you will accept a favor from your father's old friend."

Sam would have made reply in a fitting fashion, but at that instant a tragic incident occurred.

From beyond the window there was a stunning report, a

earfening crash, the glass of the window was shattered and Mr. Borden sprang up with a terrible cry, placed one hand upon his temple and fell full length upon the library floor.

CHAPTER IV.

CALLING OUT THE VIGILANTS.

So spellbound with awful horror was Sam Prentiss that he was for a moment unable to act.

Then the awful truth surged through his brain.

It was the hand of an assassin which had fired the shot through the glass of the window.

"Oh, my God!" he cried, wildly, springing to his feet. "He is shot! he is dead!"

One instant he wavered; then he bent down over the millionaire's form. Springing up, he pulled the bell-cord.

Servants came rushing into the room in terror.

"See to your master. He has been shot," cried Sixty Mile Sam. "Now for the murderer. I'll find him or die in the attempt."

The next moment, without a thought of consequences, the brave young engineer dashed through the broken window in pursuit of the assassin.

Down into the garden Sam sprung and in time to see a dark form vanish in the gloom. The young engineer without the least thought of fear sprung in pursuit.

"Hold! you scoundrel!" he cried, excitedly. "You cannot escape. Stop!"

But a mocking laugh was the only reply, and there was a bright flash in the murky air and a stunning report.

Sam felt his senses leaving him, and, stumbling forward, fell upon his face. He was sick and dizzy for a time, but gradually his strength returned.

His head rang like a chime of bells, and it was some time before he could think clearly. Then he realized the truth that he had been shot.

But that his wound was not a very serious one he at once became assured. Blood was streaming down his face and he was obliged to abandon the pursuit of the would-be assassin.

Sam returned to the house and entered by the window through which he had emerged.

He found all in a state of the wildest excitement.

The servants were running about wildly and Mr. Borden lay upon a couch pale and half insensible.

Sam stepped to a glass and inspected his wound. He found that it was but an abrasion of the scalp just above the left temple, and a gash over the crown of his head where the bullet had glanced along the skull.

It was the concussion which had caused him to faint. The wound was by no means a serious one.

But it was as narrow an escape as Sam cared to experience. He bound a towel about his head, and, being now in a calmer frame of mind, gave some attention to Mr. Borden.

The millionaire was quite seriously wounded. He lay in a half unconscious position with his eyes closed.

Sam hastily examined him, and found that a pistol ball had lodged somewhere in the head at the base of the brain.

Whether a vital spot or not he was not able to say, but it might prove a fatal hurt. Therefore he turned to the servants.

"Have you sent for the doctor?" he asked, sharply.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Very well. See to it that you work lively now. If you don't Mr. Borden will die."

Sam sat down beside the wounded man. But he was too badly off to even recognize Sam, who solicitously watched his lips for a word.

Nellie Borden knelt at the opposite side of the couch in an agony of fear and apprehension. Sam's words, however, greatly cheered her, and she preserved great calmness.

The surgeons came at last, and an examination of the wounded man was quickly made. This revealed the fact that the ball had lodged in the muscles of the neck, and not in the brain, as feared. It had glanced along the base of the skull, and took a downward course.

The bullet was easily and quickly extracted, and in response to Sam's query the head surgeon said:

"It is by no means necessarily a fatal wound, yet the patient must be kept quiet for a number of days, lest brain fever should develop. But that will not be difficult, as he is in his own home."

The spirits of all arose. The injured man tossed and raved in delirium all that night, but daybreak found him without any indications of fever.

This was most encouraging and at the hour of six Sam arose from his position at Mr. Borden's bedside and said to Nellie in an undertone:

"Miss Borden, I think there is little more to fear now. Perhaps it would be better for me to go now. I have a desire to have the affair looked after sharply by the police, and I shall go at once to headquarters."

"Indeed, Mr. Prentiss," said Nellie, earnestly, "I think you need rest. You must be worn out with your night's watching. There surely is no need of your remaining longer."

"Thank you," replied Sam. "I will see that affairs are all straight at the roundhouse and report to you later."

Sam left the Borden mansion in haste. He had indulged in no sleep that night, but this did not deter him. He had much to do.

But he found at once upon going downtown that the report of the millionaire's injury was known to nearly everybody, and immense crowds were gathered about the bulletin boards which announced every hour the change in Mr. Borden's condition.

Sam, however, at once reported to police headquarters. Detectives were, however, already out upon the track of the would-be assassin.

The police captain gave his opinion as follows:

"You can depend upon it," he said, "that Red Fawkes is at the bottom of this business. The crime will be traced to his door, and then what are we going to do?"

"Do!" exclaimed Sam, pointedly, "why, track the scoundrel down."

"Ah, but how?"

"Don't you know where to find him?"

"Very true; but it is another matter to get the fox out of his hole."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Sam, impatiently. "If the fox won't come out of his hole go into the hole after him."

"Ah, but that's not so easy. Red Fawkes has a number of followers at his back up in those inaccessible hills."

"Well, things have come to a pretty pass," said Sam, contemptuously, "when an atrocious scoundrel like that, irresponsible and blustering, can terrorize a community like this."

"It is a lamentable fact," declared the police captain. "But you are an engineer on the railroad. Why don't you take your train down to Cliff City?"

"I mean to," replied Sam, coolly.

"When?"

"This very day."

The police captain looked steadily at Sam.

"You're a young man of nerve," he declared. "I like your pluck."

"Thank you. I only believe in doing one's duty. It is silly

and absurd that Red Fawkes should be allowed to run loose. I tell you his career should be checked."

"Ah, true enough," replied the captain of police. "But supposing you send five hundred armed men up into those Vulture Hills. Do you think they could ferret out the rascal?"

"They ought to."

"The attempt has been made and failed. I tell you, Red Fawkes is a hard man to down. His position is almost inaccessible. But here is a man coming now with whom you should talk. You know him well."

A tall, fine looking gentleman with side whiskers was coming in at the door. Sam knew him as Mr. Borden's genial superintendent, Mr. Leon Fairchild.

"Ah, my young engineer," he said pleasantly, as he came up, "how do you do today? Terrible affair last night, was it not? I have just come from Mr. Borden's house. But the scamp who did it must be caught some way. That is what I came here to see you about, captain."

"And I the same," declared Sam. "I tell you, Mr. Fairchild, give me one hundred good men and I will guarantee to exterminate the outlaws of the Vulture Hills."

"I dare say you could," agreed Mr. Fairchild. "But—will you take the express out today?"

"Of course I will."

"Good! You are a young man of pluck, and you will succeed. Now, captain, why can we not locate that rogue of last night?"

"I believe he is very nearly located," declared the police captain.

"Ah!"

"It is either Red Fawkes or some other member of his gang, I feel sure."

"I agree with you. Now why not call out the vigilants again, and this time make an organized attack upon the villains?"

"I will do so at once, if you desire," declared the police captain.

"Good enough!" cried Sam. "While you are giving them battle in the hills, they will not be able to do any train wrecking. That will give us a chance to work off some of the surplus freight we have on hand."

"You are right, my boy," cried Mr. Fairchild. "Well, until Mr. Borden gets well again, Sam, you will have to take your orders from me."

"All right, sir."

"Then you will take the express out this morning?"

"I will," declared Sam.

"Good! And you, captain, will call out and organize three hundred armed and mounted men. We must make a strong move to exterminate those villains."

"Aye, aye, Mr. Fairchild!" declared the police captain. "They shall be ready within six hours."

"Well and good. Now, Sam Prentiss, let's go down to the roundhouse."

Sam and Mr. Fairchild left police headquarters and went down across the network of railroad tracks. They had soon arrived at the roundhouse.

Ben Dodge, the plucky stoker, who was Sam's mate, sat in the doorway smoking a pipe.

He dumped its contents as the newcomers appeared and sprang up, ready for orders.

"Well, Ben," cried Sam, cheerily, "are you ready for a spin?"

"I'm achin' for it, me boy," declared the brave stoker. "Are we going to try another trip through Vulture Pass?"

"We are," replied Sam. "How is Old Sixty-four?"

"As fit as a fiddle," declared Ben, earnestly. "Her fires are all going, and I can have steam up in ten minutes."

"All right," replied Sam. "Get her up at once, Ben."

The stoker ran into the roundhouse and sprang aboard Sixty-four, one of the finest engines on the Red Creek road. Sam turned to Mr. Fairchild and said:

"In twelve minutes I will be at the platform with the train. I will take her through to Cliff City or die in the attempt."

Mr. Fairchild went down to the office while Sam and Ben quickly fired up the locomotive. Soon she was roaring like a thing of life, and then they ran the noble locomotive out on the siding and hitched onto the train.

A fearful peril which neither Sam nor Ben understood hovered over them. Unseen by either in the rear part of the tender back of a coal heap, and concealed beneath a tank shelf crouched three men, all armed with revolvers and knives. What their game was near events were to reveal.

CHAPTER V.

A DARING CAPTURE.

Sam and Ben, unsuspecting their peril, ran the train down to the depot.

The train dispatcher was there, and the express agent put in an appearance with some valuable bonds in an iron box. This would be enough to tempt the train robbers, but Sam cared not for that.

"Put aboard all the passengers you can and valuable packages as well," he cried. "I mean to take the train down to Cliff City and you may bet on it."

The crowd cheered, and now that the train was loaded, the word was given to start.

Quite a number of passengers were aboard, and much valuable mail and express matter.

A dozen armed men were stationed in the mail car armed with Winchesters. This was all the precaution taken to ward off an attack by the outlaws.

Sam Prentiss had one hand upon the throttle valve waiting the signal to start. It came soon and he opened the valve, and Number Sixty-four straightened out for her swift hundred-mile run.

The train dashed out of the town and was soon speeding like the wind across the broad prairies.

It was a beautiful summer's day and Sam's spirits arose as he held the noble locomotive up to his favorite sixty-mile clip, and the panorama of scenery swept by like a millrace.

Ben sat in his window and Sam opposite, and neither dreamed of the three pairs of sinister eyes fixed upon them from the rear of the tender.

If they had suspected the presence of their foes there, their sensations would have been of a decidedly different kind.

On rushed the express with the speed of the wind and soon the Vulture Hills loomed up in front.

The critical moment was at hand and Sam sprang up and took down his rifle from its hooks in the top of the cab.

"Now, Ben," he cried, "we may look for 'music.' Be on your guard."

"Aye, aye, mate!" cried the stoker, imperturbably. "I'll keep my eye on the track ahead if you'll do the rest."

"All right."

But somehow Sam had an impression which he could not rid himself of that no attack would be made on the train on this trip. He kept a sharp eye on the track ahead, but it was perfectly clear.

Of course for aught he knew the spikes might be drawn in any of the rails ahead, but he did not credit this, for it would not be difficult for him to see even the slightest displacement of the rails, and there would naturally be some variation if any of the spikes were drawn.

But all seemed clear sailing and the train shot ahead into the dark pass like a winged meteor. Now the high frowning walls were on either side.

The train still kept up the sixty-mile clip. There was as yet no sign of the outlaws.

Sam's nerves were steel, yet he never relaxed his tense grip upon the lever which was to check the speed of the train at the slightest warning.

On and on like a mad thing fled the train through the Pass.

Half the passage was made. The track looked clear ahead.

Sam experienced a feeling of deepest relief. He drew a long breath.

"We shall be unmolested today," he muttered. "I wonder what it means. Surely Red Fawkes is up to some new game."

But Sam had never dreamed of danger in his rear, so absorbed had he been in keeping a lookout ahead.

He never saw the three stealthy forms which came from the rear of the tender, and now bounded down into the cab.

"Stop the train or you're dead men," thundered a stern voice.

It was like an electric shock to Sixty Mile Sam. He wheeled as if upon a pivot and Ben Dodge did the same. Both engineer and fireman was aghast at the sudden catastrophe.

Three masked men were before them and covered them with revolvers. The situation was a thrilling one.

The train was flying like a thunderbolt through the Pass.

Half an hour more and she would be in the open country. But the three revolvers were not to be ignored.

Sam Prentiss was daring and brave, but he knew better than to dare those revolvers. Discretion is valor's better part, and he at once adopted it.

Realizing that he was cornered, Sam was now the one to resort to some shrewd stratagem or game to yet get the upper hand of his antagonists. In vain he cudged his brain for a device to outwit them.

"Stop the train, I say!" again thundered the foremost of the three masked men.

Sam realized their situation well. He at once reversed the lever, whistled down brakes and brought the train down to a slower pace.

"That's business," declared the foremost villain, coolly. "Bring her to a dead stop opposite that gap up there. That's it."

Sam could not but obey. He knew that it would be folly to attempt disobedience, so he complied quietly with the order.

But all the while he was endeavoring to invent some way out of the scrape. He was mystified at the turn of affairs.

How had these men got access to the cab? It was beyond his power to even guess. It was very strange.

"They certainly weren't aboard the train when we left Red Creek," he muttered. "But where in the dickens did they come from?"

No amount of perplexing thought enabled him to solve the question, so he gave it up. It was enough to know that they were aboard, and that the train was practically at their mercy.

"Who are you?" asked Sam, boldly, as the train stopped.

"We are avengers," said one of the trio in a deep voice.

"You have defied the power of Red Fawkes. No man can do that and live."

The young engineer's lip curled with scorn and his eyes flashed defiance.

"So!" he exclaimed, ironically. "You are the tools of that black-hearted villain."

"Spare your abusive remarks," said the spokesman, angrily. "You are not in a position, Sam Prentiss, to be defiant."

"Yet, I am not the one to show fear to such as you," retorted the young engineer. "This Red Fawkes is a scoundrel and a cut-throat. I know not but that he is one of you."

The spokesman of the party quivered with rage, and in a hoarse, choking voice to his companion said:

"Bind the dog. Quick work now."

Before the locomotive had come to a dead stop Sam was bound hand and foot and lay helpless in the bottom of the cab.

Ben Dodge had all this while been aching to go to the assistance of his mate, but was not able to do so, as he was covered by the revolver of one of the villains.

But the train had come to a dead stop now. Those in the cars were not a little alarmed at the stop, and it was believed that the outlaws had again held up the train.

The leader of the three outlaws now covered Ben Dodge with his pistol and hissed:

"We only want your mate. You are at liberty to go. But take this warning: If you don't quit the service of this railroad at once, your days are numbered."

Ben was compelled to get down from the locomotive cab.

Meanwhile one of the outlaws had undone the couplings between the baggage car and the tender.

Springing aboard the engine now he sprung to the throttle and opened it.

All the passengers had come out of the cars to see what the trouble was. The armed men in the express car barricaded the doors and prepared for a desperate resistance.

But to the surprise of all the gorge seemed deserted. The locomotive was clear of the train and flying like mad up the track ahead.

For a few moments all were much mystified. But Ben Dodge was able to explain the affair to the comprehension of all.

It was now seen to be a well concerted and fiendish plan to capture Sixty Mile Sam, the daring young engineer. The motive for this was apparent.

Of course, public sentiment was strong in denouncing the deed. But what was to be done?

The young engineer was in the power of Red Fawkes. There was little doubt but that they would take his life and there seemed no power at hand to prevent.

But Ben Dodge was wild with frantic excitement.

"I tell ye, something must be done," he cried, madly. "Where are the vigilantes? Gentlemen, let's start the train down the grade in pursuit. If we hev' to chase them skunks to purgatory, I say, go ahead."

A cheer answered the stoker's excited call. There were plenty of volunteers to go to the rescue.

It was true that the train had been halted at the head of a grade.

To loose the brakes would be to send it down swiftly after the locomotive. There was some risk in this, yet it would be pursuit, and this was something.

There was little hesitation. Every man drew his revolver and sprang aboard. The brakes were loosed and the train started.

"Now, gentlemen," cried Ben Dodge, determinedly, "tell me that ye mean bizness an' we'll follow them ruffians down to Hades. I ain't afraid fer one."

"Let Ben Dodge lead," was the wild cry. "We will follow. Go ahead, Ben."

This was enough for the intrepid stoker. He would stop at nothing now. He was one of those bold spirits who are never so much at home as when in the midst of danger.

Down the grade ran the train with lightning speed.

Down and still down through the dark pass went the cars with their own momentum urging them to fearful speed.

But presently the grade began to change.

Ahead was a long up-grade and at the top a curve. Behind this curve the locomotive had gone from sight.

Ben knew that if the train could top this grade it could keep on, for there was a long down-grade beyond.

But it soon became evident that this was not to be.

"Oh, for a little more steam!" groaned the disappointed stoker. "Stand by your brakes, boys. Don't let her go back."

Up, and still up the grade fled the train, impelled by her own momentum.

But gradually this was overcome, and not a quarter of a mile from the top she gradually slowed down to a stop.

A judicious appliance of the brakes brought her to a stop, and did not allow any sliding back. But there was no power to go ahead with now.

What was to be done? Ben Dodge was almost insane with the hopelessness of the situation.

He sprang down from the train and cried:

"Well, let's go ahead anyway, boys. They won't go out of the hills with the engine, I am sure. We can yet overtake them."

It seemed like a forlorn hope, yet all seized it. The train was speedily emptied, and by a strange working of fate, just in time.

Suddenly a great cry of mighty horror went up on the air.

CHAPTER VI.

BEN DODGE'S DEVOTION.

There was ample justification for this cry. A most awful sight burst upon the vision of all.

Suddenly around the curve at the top of the grade the locomotive appeared.

She was coming like a thunderbolt, and it was easy to see that this was a diabolical trick of the outlaws. The cab was without an occupant.

It all happened in a flash of time.

As fortune had it, those in the cars had got out just in time. A delay of a few minutes would have caused a most horrible disaster.

Down the grade came the wild engine like a bolt from the clouds.

Sixty-four was a locomotive of the heaviest type, and now with her throttle wide open was going at the rate of ninety miles an hour.

The train was in her path. There was no use to think of averting the collision. It could not be done.

All clambered up the high bank of earth to get out of the way. They had barely time to do this.

The next moment a most frightful collision was witnessed. The locomotive struck the train with a terrific crash and swept every car from the track.

The cars were instantly made kindling-wood of, and the engine, thrown from the track, was literally buried in the debris.

Had the cars been filled with people, it was safe to say that hardly a man would have escaped alive. Fortunately, however, all had got out in time.

The sensations experienced by the witnesses of this calamity cannot be adequately described.

For some moments after the crash was over silence reigned.

Then a horrible thought struck Ben Dodge. What if Sam Prentiss had been left bound and helpless in the cab of the wild engine?

If so, he had gone down to a fearful death. With the awful fear oppressing him, Ben leaped down among the ruins.

He was aided by the others, but an assiduous search failed to reveal any trace of the young engineer's body. There was but one other conclusion to arrive at.

"They have taken him a prisoner into the hills," declared Ben Dodge. "Now, gentlemen, we are left here in this pass

with no alternative but to find our way back to Red Creek as best we can. I am for going ahead and attempting to overtake and punish the mean, sneaking gang!"

A cheer voiced the sentiments of the others.

Leaving the wreck behind them, they set out up the railroad track. Arriving at the top of the grade just beyond the curve the marks of their leave-taking of the cab were found.

There were footprints in the sand, and it was evident that they had taken Sam a prisoner into the hills.

The hills frowned dark and desolate over their heads and seemed forbidding enough in their loneliness. There were impenetrable woods, high cliffs and deep chasms. It was no joking matter to follow a trail through such a region.

"Well, what shall we do?" asked one of the party.

Ben Dodge, however, was very determined. It chanced that one of the party was an experienced Indian trailer, and his services were at once secured.

It was easy enough to follow the trail up the hillside and through the bushes. But after laborious climbing acres of ledge rock were encountered, over which nothing could be traced.

The trail was speedily lost and they began a random search.

The entire day was consumed in this manner. Then the party encamped under the brow of a cliff.

The next day Dodge was in for pushing the quest further. But the spirits of the others had now cooled considerably, and there was much hesitation.

It was deemed folly to continue the quest further.

In vain Ben tried to argue with them. The sentiment was strong that it would be better to go home and rely upon the vigilants, and it was so voted.

The stoker was disgusted and freely vented his feelings.

"All right," he cried, angrily; "you're all a set of poltroons. Go home if you want to, but I kin tell ye that I'm going to save that boy's life if I can do it."

And so it happened that Ben and the others parted company. They went back to the railroad track and the old stoker continued his search for his brave young mate whom he was loyal to even unto death.

Arrived at the railroad it occurred to one of the party, who was a telegrapher, to cut the wire and send a message to Red Creek for a train to come out and take them back home.

Accordingly this was done and the answer quickly came from Mr. Fairchild.

"Will send special at once."

It was not long before the whistle of the special was heard and then it hove in sight. A wrecking crew was aboard and these remained at the scene of the accident while the passengers were taken back to Red Creek. But brave Ben Dodge did not accompany them.

He was ere this far in the hills intent on his quest for Sixty Mile Sam.

When the special rolled into the Red Creek depot, Mr. Fairchild, pale and worried, was on the platform.

As the first of the mail car guards stepped down, the superintendent asked:

"Where is Sam Prentiss? What has happened to him?"

"He has been carried off by the outlaws," was the reply.

Then the story was detailed to Mr. Fairchild, who listened like one distraught. He expressed his feelings forcibly.

"I could not reasonably expect it of the passengers," he declared. "But certainly the armed guard should have stuck by Dodge."

"We had no orders to do so," replied the leader, sullenly.

"Orders!" exclaimed Fairchild, furiously. "That was not the trouble. You are all an arrant set of cowards. By heavens! if they kill Sam Prentiss I will level the Vulture Hills to exterminate the poisonous gang."

Mr. Fairchild, in disgust, left the cowardly guard and went to his office. As he did so a man came in rapidly, with excited mien and travel-stained. His boots and spurs showed that he was a horseman.

"What is the matter? What do you want?" asked the superintendent, in a peremptory way.

"Matter enough!" cried the man. "I am from Sim Wells, captain of the vigilants. Red Fawkes had led the whole three hundred of them into a trap, and they will all be butchered if they do not have reinforcements."

Mr. Fairchild gave a cry of horror.

"But why have you come to me?" he cried. "Why don't you go to police headquarters?"

"I have."

"Can't you get the reinforcements?"

"Hear that bell?"

The fire alarm bell was ringing furiously, and there were sounds of great excitement from the public square just below. Mr. Fairchild said:

"Yes, I hear it."

"Well, that is calling them out."

"Ah, but what has that to do with me? What can I do?"

"You must furnish a train to take them to the Hills," cried the courier. "As soon as these men are ready, they must be taken out there as quickly as possible."

"And they shall be," cried Mr. Fairchild, with alacrity. "The train will be ready in ten minutes."

The horseman left the office, and Mr. Fairchild stepped out on the platform. Fortunately the same special was yet on the track.

It had not been difficult to get an engineer to take a train of armed men out to the Vulture Hills, for he was amply protected.

The same driver consented to go, and the train was held for the arrival of the reinforcements.

The scene on the public square was such as is seen only in cities of the wild Southwest. It was a common thing, in a country infested with horse thieves and outlaws, to call the entire male population frequently to arms.

The thrilling report that the band of vigilants sent the day before to the hills were in trouble stirred Red Creek to its center.

The call by the city marshal for reinforcements was answered with the spirit of those brave heroes who went to the front in the war of '61.

Every man who could carry a rifle responded. Out of these one hundred and fifty good fighting men were chosen.

These were hustled aboard the special, and soon were on their way to the Vulture Hills. It was determined to exterminate Red Fawkes and his gang now if such a thing was possible.

Four hundred and fifty armed men, however, were not any too strong a force to defeat the outlaws intrenched as they were in the impregnable fortress of the hills. Exciting times were in prospect.

CHAPTER VII.

A CAPTIVE.

But what of Sixty Mile Sam? His position was certainly one of mighty peril. He was in the hands of his deadly foes, and face to face with death.

It would have been folly to look to them for mercy.

Their clever scheme to capture their hated foe had been successful. Now that he was in their power it was hardly likely that he would be permitted to go free again.

Fawkes had a fiendish purpose in view.

The cool courage and defiance of Sam Prentiss had provoked all the rancor of his nature. He was determined to give him a fearful example of his vengeance.

"I will prove to him that no man can defy Red Fawkes and go unscathed," he muttered. "I'll torture the young pup until he begs for mercy."

The villain was deadly in earnest in his declaration. He at once laid the plans which, as we have seen, resulted in Sam's capture.

When the locomotive reached the top of the grade the foremost of the three masked men said to the one at the throttle:

"Bring her to a stop now. We will get out here."

The order was obeyed, and the locomotive came to a stop. It was just beyond the curve, and out of sight of the passenger train.

The cords which bound Sam's ankles were cut, and he was assisted to his feet.

But his hands remained bound behind him, and a pistol was held closely to his head.

In this manner he was compelled to leave the locomotive cab. Once upon the ground one of the villains said:

"What do ye say, cap'en? Shall we leave the engine here?"

A sharp exclamation escaped the lips of the man addressed.

"I've got an idea," he cried.

"What?"

"It will be great fun, and teach the daring ones a lesson. The train is anchored back there on the track, you know. Open the throttle, reverse the machinery, and let her go back down into the train."

"Hooray! what a smash there'd be!" cried the other excitedly.

"Certainly; let her go."

"You bet I will!"

Sam's blood nigh froze in his veins with the horror of the thing. He stood for a moment petrified, and then seeing that the fiends really meant it, he burst out in horrified remonstrance.

"No, no, no! For kind Heaven's sake! You do not mean it! That would be awful—it would be murder! For the love of God, do not do it!"

But he might as well have saved his breath. The fiends sneered at his words and jeered at his exhibition of feeling.

"Ye needn't feel bad, sonny!" exclaimed one of them insultingly. "Ye'll soon be traveling the same road. Keep your mind easy."

Sam set his teeth in despair and murmured a prayer to Heaven for the safety of those on the doomed train.

He knew that it was useless to appeal to the souls of these men.

Oh, for his liberty. At that moment he felt he had the strength of a giant and could handle the three rascals single-handed. He in vain tried to break his bonds. They would not yield beneath such pressure.

"God help them all!" he moaned. "Oh, what a horrible thing to do."

The locomotive had started. The villain who had opened the throttle leaped from the cab. Every instant old Sixty-four gained speed.

She was going like a whirlwind now, and the next instant vanished behind the curve. The three villains turned and led Sam away hurriedly.

A moment later they had sprung up the steep bank high enough to look far down the track. The locomotive was seen flying like a meteor now not but a short distance from the train.

Then in that instant the collision occurred. The outlaws fancied that the cars were crowded and yelled with glee. Sam was sick and faint.

"Oh, God!" he moaned. "What awful punishment is in store for the perpetrators of this bloody deed!"

He had no time left to gaze upon the scene further. The villains seized him by the shoulders.

"We will give you a chance to interview Red Fawkes now," they cried. "Perhaps if you beg for his mercy——"

"Never!" gritted Sam.

"You won't, eh?"

"Mercy I will never ask from Red Fawkes or from you. You cannot intimidate me by your threats of torture. I am not afraid to die, nor is this the first time I have faced death."

"You're a plucky fellow," sneered the spokesman, "but we'll soon see if that bluster is more than skin deep or not."

They marched for some hours among the wildest, most desolate part of the hills. Then just at nightfall a halt was called, and Sam was blindfolded.

He could not see after this where he was being led, but some hours later he felt instinctively that he was somewhere in some sort of a cavern, and he heard voices. These drew nearer, and loud cries were heard.

"What yer got there, Jim?"

"Hello, Cal!"

"Jest got back, have ye? Dang my eyes! That ain't the young engineer, is it, the chief is lookin' fer? He'll be tickled to death."

Sam guessed that he was the center of at least half a hundred of the outlaws.

Then he was led away, a heavy door clanged behind him, the bandage about his eyes being loosened.

This he displaced as quickly as possible, and was amazed to find himself in total darkness. But by the sense of touch he went about and soon discovered that he was in a cell with walls of solid rock.

The door was of oak and tightly barred. There was no escape, however.

A small chair was in the cell and Sam sat down upon it. He was chafing inwardly with his inability to go to the relief of those whom he fancied were the victims of the accident.

"Well, this is a pretty go," he muttered. "I, Sam Prentiss, engineer and jack of all trades, locked up in this detestable place by these beastly ruffians. Faugh! I have been a fool. I had ought to have been more watchful. This will cost me my life."

Sam paced up and down in the darkness of the cell.

His mind was occupied with many and varied reflections. But no amount of thought enabled him to discover a way out of the difficulty.

He was hopelessly a prisoner. Was it fate or the result of his injudicious action? He fancied the latter, and made a mental resolve to change his tactics if he ever got out of this scrape safely.

He thought of Mr. Borden and Nellie; what would they say when the report reached them that he had fallen a victim to the vengeance of Red Fawkes.

There was a ray of hope uppermost in Sam's breast. He remembered that the Vigilantes were on the trail of the outlaws.

If they should turn up in time and defeat the outlaw gang there was a chance that he might be saved. But the chances in this direction were slender.

He imagined that this retreat of the outlaws was practically inaccessible, and that it would require no little ingenuity and labor upon the part of the Vigilantes to penetrate it.

Thus Sam spent the night in useless cogitation. Finally he dropped off into a light slumber.

When he awoke it was daylight. The hours passed slowly, but at length the cell door opened and two armed men appeared.

"Come! Red Fawkes has sent for you," declared the first.

Sam experienced a chill of dread apprehension. The critical moment had come.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARING ESCAPE.

Sam offered no resistance, and suffered himself to be led out of the cell. At least the suspense of waiting was over.

Down a long passage he followed the two outlaws.

A few moments later he came out into a mighty high-roofed cavern chamber. It was a wonderful freak of nature, and Sam now understood why the outlaws' stronghold had never been discovered.

It undoubtedly had a secret entrance, and this was why he had been blindfolded before being brought here.

In the center of the cavern chamber burned a huge fire. The heat from this seemed to dispel whatever dampness might be in the place.

Two lines of armed men were drawn up in double rank across one end of the cavern.

Sam judged that they numbered at least one hundred, and each man wore a mask.

Before them and near the fire stood a tall, strong-built man, with a mask concealing his features. He was distinguished from the rest by a red jacket, and his cap was of fox skin, with the fox's nose on the front.

This was the famous outlaw chief, as Sam well knew.

Many a stout heart would have quailed in the position of Sam Prentiss at that moment.

But the young engineer was cool and collected. He was not the one to lose his head in an exigency like the present.

Sam was led to the center of the cavern chamber. The two guards fell back and the outlaw chief came forward.

He halted not three yards distant with folded arms and said:

"So you are Sixty Mile Sam, eh?"

"That is what I am sometimes called," replied Sam, coolly.

"You are the man who has defied Red Fawkes?"

"You are right."

"You are not a fool?"

"Hardly."

"Didn't you know that your conduct was reckless, that your life would certainly pay the forfeit?"

"Sir!" said Sam coldly, "I always act in a fearless way. I was employed to take the express over the Red Creek line, and I proposed to do it in spite of Red Fawkes or anybody else."

The outlaw chief stamped his foot.

"Confound you for an upstart," he gritted. "Dare you, a boy in years, defy me? Why, I hold your life in my hands."

"There is no use in bandying words," declared Sam coldly. "We are natural enemies. If you were in my power I should turn you over to the law. I am in your power, so do with me what you will."

The outlaw chief was aghast at the perfect sangfroid of his prisoner. He had expected fear, humiliation, and a prayer for life. But this daring young engineer actually defied him.

He stood quivering with rage. He had been so long an autocrat in his bloody profession that he was at a loss how to treat this daring youth, who refused to bend the knee to him as others did.

"The fellow is mad," he muttered to himself. "He must know that death hangs over him."

"You do not fear death?" he asked aloud.

"No," replied Sam decidedly.

"We shall see."

With an evil smile the outlaw turned and beckoned to the guards. They came forward in response.

"Guard the prisoner well," declared Red Fawkes. "He says he is not afraid of death. We shall see the test and how he stands it!"

At a signal the rank and file faced about and with military precision marched out of the cavern. Sam was escorted between them and Red Fawkes walked by his side.

"You were venturesome indeed, to come into this region and defy me," the outlaw chief declared. "It must be that you do not understand Western life."

"I think I understand it quite well," Sam declared pointedly. "But I have been unfortunate. Had I not been captured by you I would have soon found a way to terminate your fiendish career."

Red Fawkes laughed scornfully.

"That is an idle threat," he said in derision. "You could never have accomplished that, my boy. It would have been impossible. I tell you I can hold at bay here an army of ten thousand men."

Before Sam could make reply there was a stir in the van of the procession and a masked man, booted and spurred, rushed up and doffed his sombrero before Red Fawkes.

"Well, what is it?" thundered the outlaw chief. "Speak up, you dog."

"The vigilantes, three hundred strong, are in the hills, sir," replied the courier. "I have hastened to tell you the news."

The effect upon Fawkes was electrical. He instantly turned and cried:

"Attention all! Fall in line! Ready for action."

Then he turned to Sam.

"Buenos, Senor!" he said politely. "Your life is spared until my return. Lucky man! Guards, care for him well."

Then, leaving Sam with the guards, Red Fawkes and his troop dashed out of the cavern. It was a sudden change in affairs.

Sam was so surprised that he hardly noticed that he was being led back to his cell by the guards.

He realized that the vigilantes were in the hills. The intelligence thrilled him. Oh, for his liberty that he might join them.

Then on the instant a sudden and daring resolve struck him.

It might cost him his life, but little he recked on this.

The two guards by his side seemed more interested in the departure of the other outlaws than in their prisoner.

Sam had been released from his bonds when he was thrust into his cell the night before. This left his feet and hands free to use as he pleased.

And he chose to use them in a very vigorous fashion.

Suddenly he let out with his fists right and left, and felled his guards to the cavern floor.

They were upon their feet a moment later, but their prisoner was flying at top speed down another passage leading out of the cavern chamber.

With angry cries the two outlaws set out in pursuit.

But Sam had secured a good start, and kept the lead. Suddenly the light of day was visible ahead, and he came out into the open air.

He was upon a high shelf of rock hemmed in upon all sides by high, rocky walls. These could not be scaled.

Below, a hundred feet, flowed the waters of a canyon stream.

There was no other way but to leap from this shelf down into the swiftly flowing stream, or turn back and risk a fight with the guards.

Sam chose the former move and at once without an instant's hesitation sprang from the dizzy height.

He knew not but that death awaited him below.

But this did not deter him. Better death than capture.

He was satisfied to trust to fate.

Down, down he went!

What a frightful leap that was. The boiling, surging waters below were waiting for him.

Two revolvers cracked upon the air.

Then the two outlaws, thunderstruck at the young engineer's daring feat, threw themselves flat upon the shelf of rock and gazed below.

Sam Prentiss had gone from sight. With cocked revolvers the outlaws eagerly watched the current.

But he did not appear.

"By golly, Tim," exclaimed one. "He's surely done for. I reckon your bullets must have cracked his skull. He hain't come up yet, an' is surely dead."

CHAPTER IX.

THE GRIZZLY BEAR.

But Sam Prentiss' career was destined never to meet so summary an end. Fortunately neither of the bullets had struck him.

Down he went into the deep water.

Fortunately he struck with feet downward so that he was not injured by the dive.

He came up a moment later, but just under a ledge of rock in a small eddy. Here he was enabled to gain a foothold and held it.

From his position he could see the watching outlaws above, though they could not see him.

He understood well enough their purpose and had no desire to give them the opportunity to make a target of him.

So he astutely held his position quietly, trusting to this little stratagem to deceive them. And he was successful.

They did not long remain in their position. Satisfied that Sam was dead, they arose and went back into the cavern.

Now was Sam's chance.

He allowed himself to drift out into the current, and drifted leisurely down the stream.

At a point not a quarter of a mile below he found a landing place. Crawling ashore he lay under a fir tree for some moments to rest himself and wring the water from his dripping clothes.

Sam felt well pleased over his escapade, and was thrilled with a sense of triumph. But prudence forbade his remaining long in the vicinity.

There was a possibility that the outlaws might come out in search of him, or to make sure that he was not alive.

"I must manage in some way to join Sim Wells and the Vigilantes," he muttered. "With them I shall feel perfectly sure of rooting out the outlaw gang."

Thus reflecting, he got upon his feet, and proceeded to clamber up the steep before him.

The mighty wilds of the Vulture Hills were about him.

He knew not what direction to take, and could only wander on aimlessly. The hills were a labyrinth of canyons and gorges, tablelands and foot-hills.

But Sam knew the vigilantes were in the hills, and was determined to find them.

He kept on clambering up precipices, skirting deep gorges, threading thick woods, and every moment listening for the distant sound of a rifle shot to guide him.

But it came not, and when he was finally in the latter part of the day about giving up the quest in despair a thrilling incident occurred.

Suddenly from a point on the mountain side just above his head Sam heard a hoarse roar.

He looked up and was horrified to see a huge grizzly bear coming swiftly down upon him.

The brute's jaws were dripping with froth, his eyes were glaring and fierce, and it was evident that he meant fight.

Sam realized his position with a thrill of horror.

He was unarmed, having not a weapon, not even a knife with which to defend himself.

To stand his ground and fight was madness. Unarmed as he was the brute could easily vanquish him.

Retreat was hardly likely to prove successful, as the nature of the ground was such that the bear could travel much faster than he could.

The situation could not be worse. What was to be done?

"My God!" gasped Sam, aghast. "I am surely done for now."

Yet he was not the one to give in without an effort.

He looked about him for some available object to use as a weapon of defense.

Several tough fagots lay upon the ground near. One of these was long and sharp pointed. It was also strong and tough.

The bear came down with mad leaps and rushed upon Sam.

The young engineer dodged the brute's paws and thrust the sharp end of the stout pole down the bear's throat.

It was a blow delivered with all his force and excellent judgment.

The effect was wonderful.

The bear reeled back and made a frantic effort to dislodge the obstruction with his paws.

But Sam thrust it deeper into the brute's throat.

It required all his strength to do this, and occasionally he got a blow from the formidable paws. But he held to his advantage strongly.

How long it could last, though, he could not guess. Should the fagot break the question of supremacy would very soon be settled.

And Sam suddenly discovered with a chill that there was great likelihood of this.

The birchen pole was tough and strong, but the bear's weight and struggles told upon it. In vain Sam tried to shut off the brute's wind by thrusting it further down his throat.

Every moment the strain became greater. The huge monster struggled and gasped and choked furiously. Suddenly with a snapping sound the bar parted.

Then the bear ejected that portion from his mouth and instantly made a rush at Sam.

Discretion was now valor's better part. It was wiser to run than to stand battle single-handed against such odds.

So Sam beat a hasty retreat with the bear close at his heels.

But the advantage lay with the grizzly. He could travel faster over the rough ground than Sam, and gained upon him at every stride.

It was plain to the young engineer that he was certain to be overtaken. He strained every nerve but the bear gained upon him.

Suddenly he stumbled and fell. Before he could rise the big brute was upon him. With a blow of his paw he knocked Sam flat again, and the young engineer's fate would have been speedily settled but for a fortunate incident.

A wild shout came from the height above, followed by the crack of a rifle. The big grizzly gave a hoarse roar and pitched forward upon the ground. Every muscle stiffened, and Sam, regaining his feet, saw that a bullet had entered the bear's brain through the eye.

He was saved. Instinctively he glanced up to see who his preserver was and a wild cry burst from his lips:

"Ben Dodge!"

Down the mountain side with long strides came the faithful stoker. His joy was such as words could not express at sight of Sam alive and well.

"By jingo, I knew I'd find ye," he cried wildly, as he hugged Sam in his exuberance. "And ye're all safe. But how in time did ye give the outlaws the slip?"

Mutual expressions of joy were exchanged, and then Sam detailed his adventures in full. Ben listened with breathless interest.

Then he told of the search through the hills by the passengers of the train. How they had finally given up the quest.

"But it's glad I am that I didn't turn back myself," cried the stoker joyfully. "If I hadn't come along jest now you'd have been food for that bear."

"I owe you my life," said Sam gratefully.

"That's nothing. But what shall we do now?" cried Ben. "Go back to the railroad and hoof it to Red Creek?"

"No," replied Sam. "The vigilants are in the hills to exterminate Red Fawkes and his gang. I move we join them."

"Put it there, pard," cried Ben, excitedly. "I'm in with ye, an'—"

He stopped short. At that moment six masked men appeared on a spur of the mountain wall not fifty yards above, and a sharp voice cried:

"Hands up or you are both dead men."

There seemed no alternative. Six rifles covered them. To refuse was death.

CHAPTER X.

A VICTORY.

A more thrilling situation than that in which Ben Dodge and Sam were now placed could not be imagined.

"Hands up!"

That meant obey or die, and as life was yet dear to them, they were compelled to accede to the request.

Up went their hands.

"That is common sense," said the same speaker, as he lowered his rifle and came down beside them. "You'd have been dead men in another minute. But—hello, pards; as I live here is the young engineer Fawkes had as a prisoner in the cave. How did he get here, I'd like to know."

The other outlaws, astounded, came down by the side of the prisoners. All were amazed to see Sam here.

"How did it happen?"

"He must have escaped."

"Look here, friend," said the spokesman of the gang to Sam, "tell us how you got out of the cave?"

Sam could see no reason for withholding the truth, so he said:

"Certainly! I knocked over the two men who had me in charge, and, running out of the cave, jumped down a hundred feet into a deep stream of water."

A long whistle escaped the outlaw's lips, and he regarded Sam incredulously.

"Sho!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you jumped off that ledge?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I'm busted," he cried, in utter amazement. "And you escaped with your life. That beats me. However, you must be right, for that is the only way you could possibly have escaped."

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Sam, briefly.

"Do with ye?" exclaimed the outlaw, slowly. "I'm goin' to take ye back to the cave and let you settle with the chief."

Sam knew that it was of no use to attempt to bribe the fellow. Back to captivity he must go.

This seemed hard, indeed, after his plucky attempt to gain his liberty.

Yet there was no way, but to make the best of it, and Sam said:

"All right, if we must go let us go right along."

"Oh, ye're in a hurry, eh?" sneered the outlaw.

"Well, yes, a little bit," agreed Sam. "The sooner a bad job is over the better, you know."

All laughed at this, and one of the outlaws said:

"I say, my friend, ye're a plucky one. I hate to see a man like ye stretch hemp. But we're obeying the chief's orders, ye know."

"It's my candid 'pinyun," declared Ben Dodge, speaking for the first time, "that ye won't have any chief to take orders from afore many days."

"Eh?" exclaimed one of the outlaws. "What do you mean?"

"I kin tell ye that the whole community of Red Creek has turned out to exterminate Red Fawkes and all his tribe. You had better look out yerself."

A sneering laugh escaped the outlaw's lips.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, contemptuously, "there ain't men enough in the state of Texas to drive Red Fawkes out of his den. I tell ye they can't even find it."

"Time will tell," muttered Ben Dodge, grimly.

Ben's rifle was taken away from him now, and the hands of both prisoners were bound behind them.

In this manner they were led away around the mountain-side.

But they had not gone far when one of the men stopped with a violent start.

He bent down and scrutinized the ground closely.

"A trail!" he muttered.

"Eh? Who is it?" asked the leader.

"None of our boys."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who can it be then?"

"Some of the vigilantes, I'll stake my life. Twenty at least."

The outlaws seemed much disturbed at this discovery. Several of them withdrew some little distance from the others and held a conference.

The result was that the leader suddenly turned and said:

"Come, boys, there's no time to lose. We must get back to the cave as quickly as possible."

The words had barely left his lips when a stern voice cried:

"Hands up! Surrender in the name of the law."

From behind a pile of bowlders fully twenty men sprang up covering the six outlaws with their rifles.

There was no chance for retreat or the alternate of a bush fight. They were in the open, and exposed to the fire of the rifles.

The effect of this upon the outlaws was startling; for a moment not one of them moved, but stood looking aghast at their captors.

Then they saw that the game was up. They were sure to be captured. The vigilantes outnumbered them more than three to one.

"Curse the luck," gritted the leader.

"Hands up!" came the warning cry.

The order was obeyed, and the next moment Ben and Sam had their bonds cut and were eagerly greeting friends. It was a joyous occasion.

"I don't know whether we will succeed in defeating Red Fawkes or not," declared the leader of the vigilantes, "but we have sent for reinforcements. Sim Wells has been fighting them all day in the valley above here and the men are all worn out."

"Count us in!" cried Sam, enthusiastically. "We want to become vigilantes for a short time, don't we, Ben, old man?"

"I should say we did," agreed the stoker, with a grim smile.

"Well, we are glad of an addition to our force," cried the leader of the twenty. "You can fall in with us if you desire. We are going over to the scene of the fight now."

"That is just where I want to go," declared Sam.

The vigilantes had been repulsed by the outlaws, but by no means defeated. It was certainly evident that Red Fawkes was going to be hard pushed on this occasion.

Without further delay the party set out for the scene of action. Very soon the sound of distant firing was heard. Cutting through a narrow pass, they soon came upon the scene of the conflict.

The vigilantes were under cover of bushes and rocks in a position upon a hillside.

The outlaws were opposite. Several times the vigilantes had tried to carry the position, but each time had failed.

A desultory skirmish fight was now in progress. The battle was rapidly being concentrated.

There had been some loss of life on both sides, and twenty of the outlaws had been made prisoners. This was encouraging, and there was a prospect of victory if the outlaws did not slip out of their grasp.

Bluff Sim Wells, the leader of the vigilantes, came forward as Sam and the others appeared. He was glad to have his ranks swelled, and asked about the reinforcements for which he had sent to the city.

Of course Sam could give him no information in regard to these. The young engineer, armed with a rifle, with Ben Dodge by his side, went into the fight.

It chanced to be the crisis of the day. Red Fawkes had concentrated his men, and, believing the time ripe, had decided upon one grand attack and conclusive victory. How he was disappointed in the latter we shall soon see.

The firing had seemed to take a lull upon the outlaws' side of the ravine. But suddenly a great cry went up.

The tremendous discharge of a hundred rifles was heard, the bushes seemed a living sheet of flame, and then the great cry went along the vigilantes' line:

"Stand firm! They are coming!"

CHAPTER XI.

A KIND OFFER.

Nobody was more surprised than Sim Wells that the outlaws should risk the fortunes of the day all in one grand charge. But such was Red Fawkes' purpose.

The truth was, the outlaw chief believed the vigilante line weak and short of ammunition.

It was his fancy that by a bold dash he could turn their line and drive them into a rout.

Had the outlaw's information been reliable and such have been the case, there was no doubt but that his generalship would have won the victory.

But, on the other hand, the outlaws were really quite strongly placed and no ordinary charge could have hoped to dislodge them.

"Stand firm and close up, boys," cried Sim Wells. "Hold your fire until they are near enough. Wait for the word."

Every man heard the word of command and heeded it.

On came the long line now down the hillside. Across the ravine they charged and up the slope.

Rough looking fellows, they were masked and carrying their rifles at the charge. The vigilantes waited until they were halfway up the slope.

Then the order came:

"Fire!"

A sheet of flame leaped above the fringe of bushes. A perfect hail of bullets swept down the ravine.

It was a fearful volley. Again and again the repeaters sent the leaden rain into the ranks of the foe.

Nothing human could stand before that fearful storm of death. The line wavered, fell back, reformed and then broke into disorder.

Wild cheers rang from the throats of the vigilantes.

The time had come for the decisive blow and along the line went the order:

"Charge!"

Down the slope in pursuit sprung the vigilantes. The outlaws' line was shattered. Everywhere they were being made prisoners. There was no time for recovery—the battle was won.

While at this moment a wild cheer came from the mountain-side above and a hundred armed men appeared. It was the band of reinforcements for which Sim Wells had sent in the morning.

They had come just as victory was declared. Their services, however, were needed in tracking the stray remnants of the train-wrecking gang, so that they found work to do as it happened.

It was near dark when the vigilantes abandoned their pursuit and camped right in the heart of the robbers' stronghold.

Everybody was in jubilant spirits, and the cavern was explored to its furthest depths. Tons of stolen goods were found, and quite a sum of money. But the bulk of the treasure the crafty Red Fawkes had managed to spirit away.

Neither was the outlaw chief among those captured. He had taken care to make good his escape.

That night was passed in the outlaws' cavern. The next morning early a start was made for the railroad track and the special train which was in waiting for them.

The prisoners were placed aboard of the train first and taken down to Red Creek. The vigilantes followed later.

The little city was thrown into a state of the wildest excitement when the special came in. An immense crowd of people were at the depot, and all were jubilant when it was known for a certain fact that the nest of outlaws had been broken up.

Sam Prentiss went at once into Mr. Fairchild's office with his report. The superintendent complimented him highly for his daring and handed him a note from Mr. Borden. Sam broke the seal and read:

"Sam Prentiss:—Upon your return come as soon as possible to the house. I would like to see you.

"Yours truly,

"OSCAR BORDEN."

Wondering not a little what the railroad magnate could want to see him about, Sam went at once up to the house. A servant showed him in.

Into Mr. Borden's room Sam was led. The millionaire was reclining upon a sofa and looked much brighter than Sam had seen him look since his injury.

"Well, Sam," said Mr. Borden, with a pleasant smile. "You have come promptly. I am glad of that."

"I always mean to be prompt," replied Sam, modestly.

"I believe you, Sam. To the faithful you know reward is certain. Mr. Fairchild has told me of your loyalty and your bravery in taking the train through the Vulture Pass."

"Indeed, sir, that was nothing of consequence," protested Sam.

"Oh, yes, it was," reiterated the millionaire. "I believe your brave action has done more to exterminate the outlaws than anything else. You have saved the railroad from bankruptcy. Why should I not be grateful?"

"Indeed, sir, I wish you would not feel any obligation."

"Ah, but I do, and I am desirous of rewarding you, Sam."

"I desire no reward."

"Ah, but I insist. What is nearest your heart, my boy?"

Sam fidgeted uneasily, and said, awkwardly:

"Indeed, sir, I can accept nothing for my services."

"We shall see," smiled Mr. Borden. "Sam, I believe you are a young man of more than ordinary ability. Now, I am going to try and help you develop your talents. There is a position which I would like you to fill, and I will double the salary. I need Fairchild as freight agent. Will you accept his position as general superintendent?"

Sam felt giddy and embarrassed. He knew not how to reply for some moments.

"Mr. Borden, I thank you," he said in a full voice. "But—"

"Tut, tut—you cannot get out of it, boy. I shall not release you. Promise me that you will accept the position."

"I cannot."

"But you must."

"But Mr. Fairchild—"

"Have no fears. He will receive the same salary as freight agent. He will like the change."

Sam felt a great lump in his throat. While he appreciated Mr. Borden's magnificent offer, he could not help the feeling that he was hardly qualified for the position.

He looked the millionaire straight in the face and said, resolutely:

"Mr. Borden, I am very grateful to you for your kind treatment, but I fear that you have far over-estimated my abilities. I beg to decline your kind offer for certain very excellent reasons."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the millionaire, with interest. "What may they be, Sam?"

"In the first place," continued Sam, "I am as yet practically a stranger to you. You are placing great trust in me, and I would rather have you know me better before selecting me for such a grand position."

"I am but a boy in years. I would like to rise in the world, but I do not care to rise so suddenly. Try me awhile longer where I am, sir, and then if you are of the same mind in two years from now, you can, if you see fit, promote me. But to tell the truth, sir, I do not feel that I am old enough to accept the responsibilities of the office of superintendent. That is why, sir."

Mr. Borden looked keenly at Sam. He saw the wisdom of the boy's words, and was deeply struck with it.

"Sam," he said, with sudden conviction, "you talk with good sense. I like your words. It is conscientious of you to refuse such an offer. I will say this: Stay where you are for two years if you choose. At any time when you think you have qualified yourself for the position, let me know and you shall have it."

Sam's voice choked as he replied:

"You are over kind, sir. I shall always remember you, Mr. Borden, as my dearest friend. I will work hard and try to qualify myself for the place."

Sam left the house with a strange buzzing in his ears, the result of an overstrain of the mental faculties. It all seemed to him like an unreal dream.

Indeed, the railroad magnate was in his right mind. And he must surely have had unbounded confidence in him to offer him such an unprecedented elevation, from engineer to superintendent of the road.

Sam might have been excused a slight touch of vanity at that moment. But it did not impair his good judgment.

"I will work hard to make myself worthy of the place," he muttered. "Ah, Sam Prentiss, orphan boy though you are, there is yet a chance for you to rise in the world."

Then his thoughts, strangely, turned to Nellie Borden. He recalled her sweet face and trusting manner, and his heart

warmed strangely. A strange glow of happiness stole over him.

Would it not be possible to make himself doubly worthy? The bare thought that he might some day win her favor filled his whole life with a wild ecstatic happiness.

But dark days were close at hand.

CHAPTER XII.

OFF THE RAILS.

When Sam got back to the depot it was a late hour. But the waiting-room was filled with passengers, and as he appeared Mr. Fairchild came quickly up to him, saying:

"I am glad you have come, Sam. Would it be too much to ask of you to take a train down to Cliff City tonight? There are a great many people who have been waiting here a good while to get safe passage."

"Of course, I will," cried Sam, impulsively. "Here comes Ben Dodge now."

The genial stoker had been paying some little heed to the inner man and felt decidedly better.

Of course, he was ready to accompany Sam, and, going down to the roundhouse, the best engine was taken out.

The track was announced clear, and on the morrow the regular schedule would be on once more.

The express filled up rapidly. Now that it was known that the outlaws of Vulture Pass were disbanded, everybody's fear vanished and delayed travelers were very anxious to get through.

The train loaded rapidly, and as the starting gong sounded Sam opened the throttle and let the locomotive out.

Once more he was at his post, and, setting the pace at sixty miles per hour over the steel rails, Sam was in his element now.

Like a thing of life the heavily loaded train fled on through the black night.

On and on, faster and faster. Sam sat in the cab window and kept watch of the track ahead.

The headlight threw a glare far ahead and illumined the track as plain as day. But beyond that radius all was a pall of gloom.

It was one of the blackest of nights, yet, believing the track clear, Sam did not check the speed anywhere.

Now they were nearing Vulture Pass. There was just a trifle of a chill traversing Sam's backbone.

But he knew that his fears must be groundless. The outlaws had certainly left the hills.

Now they had entered the Pass. Ye gods! how awful Stygian and impenetrable was the gloom.

Yet Sam did not touch the lever, but allowed the mighty iron horse to gather fresh speed as he went on.

It looked like a daring thing to do to go down through the Pass at that rate of speed. But Sam Prentiss never thought of abating it.

The shadow grew thicker. A mighty sullen echo came from the crags overhead.

Every moment Sam kept watch of the track. He knew the danger well, that some stray members of the outlaw gang might be in the place and place some obstruction on the track to throw the train for mere revenge.

If such had been the case, death and ruin would have followed.

The train would have hardly been able to stop in time. But fortunately nothing of the kind happened.

The hills gradually melted away, and the train shot out into the open country.

At a sixty-mile clip it crossed the intervening stretch of country. Whew! what a swift run that was.

Yet, with such a scientific hand did the boy engineer handle the locomotive that the train hardly rocked, and glided along with such ease that the passengers would never have suspected that they were traveling faster than a thirty-mile clip.

The curves were taken with the greatest of ease and the grades topped at lightning speed. On and on went the flying train under the master hand of Sixty Mile Sam, the fast boy driver.

Now the lights of Cliff City hove in view. The wonderful run had been made with phenomenal ease, and when the locomotive whistled for the signal lights of Cliff City, all in the cars remarked upon the shortness of the ride.

Into the depot of Cliff City rolled the express. The people disembarked and went their way.

Sam leaped out of the cab with his oil can and began to lubricate the locomotive's bearings. As he was engaged in this work some person in the crowd thrust a small sheet of paper in his face.

It fell at Sam's feet. Whoever gave it to him disappeared as suddenly, so that identification was impossible.

Mystified, Sam picked the paper up and saw his name written upon it in irregular letters:

"Sixty Mile Sam:—Yu ar' ther kuss what has brok up our gang an' we ar' goin' tu have revenge. Keep yure eye open, yu will git yure pay. Take keer of this.

"Yours truly,

"1 OF THE GANG."

Sam read this extraordinary message with odd sensations. He hardly knew why, but a strange suspicion seized him that mischief was afoot, and that very night, too.

There was no doubt but that one of the outlaw gang had written this communication. But Sam kept his courage up, and when the starting gong rang his train was all ready for the return trip and loaded with passengers.

But when once more nearing the Vulture Hills, a strange presentiment seized Sam Prentiss.

For the first time in his life he checked the speed of his train in Vulture Pass. It was well that he did this, for in the very depths of the Pass an awful warning cry burst from Ben Dodge.

"Good heavens, mate," he shrieked. "Choke her off. We're goin' into the mountain if we don't. The track is up."

Sam Prentiss jammed down the lever and opened the whistle valve for down brakes. But it was too late, and the next moment the locomotive had left the iron.

CHAPTER XIII.

DANGER AHEAD.

It was well that Sixty Mile Sam had yielded to his presentiment and checked his train in the pass. If it had been going at the usual speed the wreck would have been frightful indeed.

As it was the locomotive left the rails and bumped along on the sleepers for forty or fifty feet, but did no further damage.

Not a person on board was injured, though all were shaken up. It was a literal miracle.

Almost instantly, as soon as the train came to a stop, the passengers leaped out in wild confusion and excitement. Sam looked first to his engine, and making sure that she was in an easy position with no danger of the boiler blowing up, also leaped to the ground.

The cause of the accident was easily seen.

The rails had been displaced by some villain, probably one or more of the outlaws, with the certain intention of wrecking the train.

The terrified and excited male passengers were pouring from the cars armed with revolvers. Not a man was present but expected a scrimmage with the outlaws.

"Give 'em a fight if they want it."

"Finish up the Vigilantes' work."

"Hang every outlaw!"

These were the excited cries which went up on the air, and had anyone of the train-wreckers been visible, he would have been a target for a score of pistols.

But the pass was deserted and lonely in the dim light. Red Fawkes was not on hand with his cut-throat gang. Without doubt the job was a bit of revengeful work upon the part of one or more of the outlaws.

The expressions of anger and futile threats of punishment from the passengers for a time filled the air. Then everybody seemed to cool down, and as soon as it was found that nobody was injured, the spirits of the dismayed ones revived.

But it was for a time a question as to what ought to be done. To get the locomotive on the rails again was a matter of no light consideration.

Fortunately, Sam had a telegraph sounder in the cab.

A wire was tapped, and a message sent back to Red Creek for a wrecking train. After this all that could be done was to await the coming of the train.

It was a brief wait. Ere long the welcome whistle was heard up the gorge, and the headlight of the relief engine was seen.

In a short while, with the aid of jackscrews, the train was placed again upon the track. Then the rails were spiked in place, and once more the express was thundering on her way to Cliff City, while the relief train went back to Red Creek.

Meanwhile a message had been sent to Cliff City, and a large crowd were at the station to see the express when it came in.

The excitement was tremendous.

But this was the last stroke of rascality ever done by Red Fawkes' men in the Vulture Pass. The next morning men scoured the hills thoroughly, but the last of the miscreants had scattered and fled.

Trains were running regularly on the Red Creek road, and the condition of affairs was vastly improved by the removal of Red Fawkes and his gang.

Mr. Borden recovered from his wound sufficiently to be able to attend to his own business once more. Everybody was pleased to see his smiling face at the railway station again.

Sixty Mile Sam was faithful at his post, taking the express out regularly. Matters began to slide along in the old ruts. Nothing had been seen or heard of Fawkes since the disastrous battle in the hills.

It was rumored that he had gone to Australia. However this was, it was certain that no further interference with the train or the Red Creek Railroad followed.

Mr. Borden recovered rapidly from his wound, and was always in his office. Every day he discovered new traits to admire in the young engineer, Sixty Mile Sam.

Nellie Borden came often to the station, and Sam frequently saw her. A sort of instinctive liking was mutual with the young people, and Sam was never so happy as when in her society.

One day Nellie was going down to Cliff City on the train, and stood on the platform just as Sam sprang out of his cab, oil can in hand, looking as spruce and handsome as one could well imagine.

In that instant an idea struck Nellie, and she came forward, eagerly saying:

"Oh, Mr. Prentiss, can I not ride on the engine with you? I have never ridden on a locomotive cab in my life."

Sam experienced a thrill such as he seldom felt, and never except in the presence of the beautiful girl before him. In an instant off came his cap, and he bowed low as he replied:

"Of course you can, Miss Borden. I shall be only too happy to have you. But will you not soil your dress in so dirty a place?"

A merry laugh pealed from the young girl's lips. Little she thought of this risk, and was lifted into the cab by Sam.

She was pleased to note how clean and shining everything was in the cab. Certainly there was no danger of spoiling good clothes here. Sam Prentiss was not a slothful engineer.

"Oh, my, isn't this grand?" she exclaimed, as she seated herself in Sam's own seat by the cab window. "I think it is delightful. I wish I was a man myself. I would be an engineer."

Her eyes met Sam's, and there was such an ardent light of admiration in them that she turned pink as a peony.

Very soon the signal was given and the train started. Soon the locomotive was speeding out of Red Creek, and sped away across the wide prairies.

It certainly was exhilarating sport for Nellie, riding in the locomotive cab. The experience was a novel and interesting one.

She could see readily while they were speeding a sixty mile clip how much depended on the engineer. The making of curves and grades without losing the impetus or steadiness of the train was a feat not easily done.

On and on rushed the train. Now the dark heights of the Vulture Pass loomed up in front of them.

Nellie, in the cab window, allowed her hair to blow in the wind like a golden cloud, her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, rich color was in her cheeks, and old Ben Dodge paused in his work once to note what a handsome pair the young engineer and the president's daughter made as they sat there chatting pleasantly, Sam's eye being upon the track ahead at intervals.

"By gump!" he muttered, ejecting a quid of tobacco. "My name isn't Ben Dodge, or that'll be a go yet. I don't keer if he is only an engineer. He's a gentleman born, every inch on him, an' ye kin see it easy enuff."

Sam and Nellie were so absorbed in each other that they became really quite oblivious of the old stoker's presence. But they had nothing to fear from honest old Ben.

Thus the train sped on through Vulture Pass, where not many weeks before the outlaw band of Red Fawkes had held dominion and terrorized the traveler.

Soon they were once more upon the prairies, but just beyond was a series of foothills.

Through these there flowed a shallow stream of water. Across it was built a bridge upon a low trestle.

The girders and cross beams were of wood. It had long been regarded as partly unsafe, and Mr. Borden was making preparations for a new bridge.

This bridge could not be seen until after rounding a curve, not a quarter of a mile distant, and even then not distinctly until within a few hundred yards.

Sam had been so absorbed with Nellie's society that he had not noted a thrilling state of affairs. Suddenly glancing ahead, he gave a terrible cry and sprang up.

They were rapidly speeding toward the bridge, which was wrapped from end to end in red flames. Death seemed imminent.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN IN THE BOAT.

It did not seem as if any power on earth could avert a frightful disaster which must cost many lives.

The bridge was completely wrapped in flames, and without doubt the weight of the train upon it would break it down.

At the speed they were going the whole train would be flung into the waters of the stream and with such force that the result would be awful to contemplate.

Sam Prentiss, with face white as driven snow, sprang to the lever.

Ben Dodge was by his side. Nellie, pale and horrorstricken, clung to the window frame.

With one hand Sam forced the lever back, with the other pulled the whistle valve for down brakes.

The train experienced the instant jarring, jolting motion of a sudden stop.

Every brakeman understood that it meant danger and was at his post. Sam's prompt action would certainly have stopped the train under ordinary circumstances.

But it chanced that they were on a down grade, and the momentum of the train was sufficient to overcome the action of the brakes for a distance. This brought the locomotive and train down to the burning bridge.

And here a very strange thing happened. The train came to a stop just at the edge of the abutments, but the locomotive had been pushed onto the bridge. As a result the flames swirled over the locomotive cab in a mighty devouring mass.

Long, lance-like tongues shot through the cab windows, threatening to consume everything in the place. Sam felt the terrible heat drawing his flesh. He realized their awful position and saw that Nellie's dress was on fire.

In an instant he had thrown his arms about her, and smothered the flames just in the nick of time.

Then, with wonderful presence of mind, he sprang to the lever and reversed the engine to back off the bridge.

But he was just too late.

There was a rending, cracking sound, a fearful sinking sensation, and Sam knew that the bridge had given way.

Nellie Borden gave a wild scream and sprang into Sam's arms.

Ben Dodge stuck with heroism to his post.

One moment the flames overwhelmed the locomotive, blistering the flesh of the occupants, then there was a tremendous rush of waters and how it all came about Sam never knew, but he suddenly found himself out in the river's current, swimming, with Nellie Borden on his right arm.

By a wonderful act of Providence the heavily braked train had not followed the locomotive into the river, else a horrible fatality would have ensued. The couplings had parted, and the first car of the train was not three feet from the edge of the abutment. It was truly a miracle.

The locomotive was imbedded in the mud of the river, which threw up hissing clouds of steam as the water put out the fires. The river current was filled with drifting, smoke blackened timbers.

The current was quite swift here, and before Sam could do ought to prevent he was carried around a bend and out of sight of the train.

He found great difficulty in keeping afloat weighted down as he was, and was about to swim for one of these timbers when he saw a man in a boat just putting out from the shore.

Sam shouted for help, but the boatman did not turn his head. However, he was rowing swiftly toward them, so it was evident that he was coming to their relief.

"Have courage, Miss Borden," said Sam, encouragingly. "We will soon be out of danger. It was a close call, though."

"But for your bravery my life would have been lost," said Nellie, gratefully.

"But for my carelessness we would not have run onto that bridge," said Sam modestly.

Before more could be said the boat shot alongside.

Sam gripped the gunwale with one hand and said:

"Take her first, my friend. I can swim ashore alone."

"All right, boss," said the boatman, in a gruff voice.

He lifted Nellie into the boat, which was but a light affair.

He seemed a stranger to Sam, who could see but little of his face, which was concealed by a heavy slouch hat.

However, Sam regarded him as a woodsman living in the vicinity. The young engineer hesitated a moment with one hand upon the gunwale.

Whereupon the boatman, having deposited Nellie in the stern of the light craft, said huskily:

"There ain't room fer another, stranger. Can't ye swim?"

"All right," replied Sam, dropping off into the current.

The boat shot away and the young engineer began the long swim to the shore. Of course the boat reached the shore long before him.

It would not have been out of reason to suppose that the boat would return for the swimmer, after landing Nellie, but it did not.

The craft shot out of sight under a fringe of willows, and Sam could not see the landing.

But at this moment he heard a splashing in the water, and a voice just above his position. Turning his head Sam received a thrill of surprise.

"Hello, Sam! I'm glad ye're safe. Where's the gal?"

It was Ben Dodge.

"Thank Heaven you are safe too, Ben," cried Sam joyfully.

"Oh, yes, Miss Borden is safely on shore now."

"I'm deuced glad of that," averred the stoker, as he rested a moment on a piece of charred timber. "I 'low it was a pooty close call, my boy."

"You're right," said Sam. "Are you hurt at all, Ben?"

"Not a bit."

"And are you good for the swim?"

"I reckon I am."

"Come on, then."

"I'm with ye."

Side by side they now struck out for the shore. Sam congratulated himself on their fortunate escape from death. Suddenly Ben paused a little in his stroke.

"But how did the gal get ashore?" he asked.

"A fellow out here in a boat took her in," replied Sam.

"Where is he?"

"Ashore with her, I suppose."

"Queer he don't come out to give us a lift."

Sam had thought of this.

"What do ye think?" suddenly asked Ben again. "Who set the bridge on fire?"

Sam gave a mighty start.

"Do you think it was incendiary work, Ben?" he asked.

"Of course I do."

"Why?"

"Why not? What would set it afire, I'd like to know?"

"Possibly a spark from a passing engine."

"Yes, maybe," said the stoker incredulously. "I tell ye that somebody was trying a snide trick. It cum nigh being the end on us, that's sure."

"Heavens!" gasped Sam as a sudden, horrible fear dawned upon him. "You don't suppose that fellow in the boat could have had anything to do with it——"

Sam Prentiss did not finish the sentence. At that moment his blood was congealed with horror at an incident which now occurred.

From the shore there came a thrilling wild scream of terror. It was Nellie Borden's voice calling for help.

For an instant Sam was sick and faint, and likely to drown. Then a mad, desperate cry escaped his lips, and he struck out for the shore.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL.

Ben Dodge was close by the young engineer's side. Both knew what the exigency was.

Therefore there was no need of words. Action was the order of the hour, and it was promptly made.

Through the water, exerting every nerve and sinew, they swam.

Every stroke brought them nearer to the shore.

But it was a long distance and valuable time was consumed. On they dashed with all strength.

Once again the wild cry for help rose upon the air. This time it was a smothered note of distress.

Then all was stillness.

It seemed an age before the two swimmers reached the shore and scrambled up the bank. A depth of tangled woods was before them. But there was no sign of Nellie or the boatman anywhere.

Swiftly they searched the vicinity. Suddenly a sharp cry from Ben drew Sam's attention. Upon a tree was posted a notice written in a scrawling hand upon a dirty bit of coarse, brown paper:

"To the poor fool that will read this: It is a long road which has no turn and this is the time you are fooled. Vengeance is sweet and you'll freely acknowledge is now fully in the hands of

"RED FAWKES."

A sharp, agonized cry broke from Sam's lips. He stood for a moment with trembling knees and pallid face.

"Oh, my God, Ben!" he gasped, "Nellie Borden's fate is sealed! That brute will murder her to revenge himself upon Mr. Borden! It is too awful!"

But Ben Dodge was the cooler of the two. He was indeed desperately anxious for Nellie's fate. Yet he looked into the exigency in a calmer mood.

"No!" he said, sharply. "'Tain't no sech thing. That ornery cuss won't kill a pretty gal like that."

"Ah, but captivity in such hands is a fate worse than death."

"No, it won't be nuthin' like o' that."

"What do you mean?"

"Jest this: That skunk is mighty long-headed. He won't harm that gal. He knows there's a likely ransom for her when he chooses to ask it."

Sam could not help but see the logic of this. Ben certainly had looked at the matter in a sensible light. That Fawkes would cater for a ransom looked logical.

At once his spirits brightened. In a cooler manner they now endeavored to track the villainous abductor. But diligent search resulted in no clew.

The boat yet lay upon the shore, but though the footprints were followed in the clayey soil up the bank they could not be traced beyond.

After some valuable time spent thus, it was decided to abandon the quest and return to the train for assistance.

It was not a difficult matter to make their way around the bend in the shore to where a view of the demolished bridge could be had.

The locomotive was half submerged in the river and the banks were lined with excited people—passengers from the train.

It had been at first supposed that Sam and his mate had gone down to their death in the wreck, but their appearance now disproved this.

They were greeted enthusiastically, though when the story of the latest act of villainy on the part of Red Fawkes was recited all were horrified.

Nellie Borden in the hands of the unscrupulous outlaws! It was a fearful thing to contemplate.

For a time all were in a quandary as to how to act.

A message was sent to Red Creek by tapping the wire for a wrecking train. Twenty of the passengers armed with revolvers volunteered to accompany Sam in quest of the outlaw.

The young engineer was determined to rescue Nellie if it took his life to do it. He gladly accepted the offer.

Of course Ben Dodge insisted on accompanying him. In this manner they set out.

Fortunately among the number was an old hunter and Indian fighter who was an adept at trailing.

His sharp eye at once located the trail of the abductor. After examining the ground carefully he said:

"Gents, I think I kin tell ye to a dead sure thing what the vilyun hes done. He hes jest gagged the gal an' tied her hands behind her, an' she hes bin obliged to walk beside him through the woods. They kain't go very fast an' it's likely we'll overtake them afore long."

A cheer greeted this announcement, and the little band of rescuers set out enthusiastically on the trail.

With unerring precision the scout led the way through the forest.

Suddenly they came out into a clearing, in the center of which was a cabin. It was a dilapidated structure, with a long shed in the rear.

The trailer paused and said:

"It's a safe wager thet yer man is in thet cabin."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a catastrophe occurred.

Suddenly there was a sharp report, and a puff of smoke issued from a loophole in the cabin.

It was a pistol shot, and one of the party threw up his arms and fell dead.

The cabin was certainly occupied, and with prudence all retired to the cover of the trees. The party was not large enough to wholly surround the clearing, but the result of the conference was a decision to charge upon it.

First, however, one of the party stepped out and gave a hail.

"Hello, the cabin!"

"Well?" was the reply, in a gruff voice.

"We know you, Red Fawkes, and you cannot escape us. However, we will spare your life if you will surrender to us the young girl who is in your power."

A jeering laugh was the reply, followed by a pistol shot. This settled the matter and the party were about to charge, when a black horse suddenly bounded out from beneath the sheds.

Upon its back was the outlaw, and in his arms was the helpless form of Nellie Borden. A wild, mocking laugh escaped his lips, and Red Fawkes struck spurs into the horse's flanks.

Sam Prentiss was the nearest one to him. The young engineer set his teeth with grim determination, and, taking deliberate aim, said:

"God help this bullet to speed true."

Then he pulled the pistol trigger and fired at the villain.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VILLAINOUS ASSAULT.

Just at that moment the black horse gave a leap. Sam's bullet, instead of reaching Red Fawkes, the real target, struck the steed just under the shoulder.

It was a mortal wound, straight to the heart, and the horse fell in a heap.

Red Fawkes was thrown, but was instantly upon his feet. Nellie Borden was freed from his embrace, and, having the use of her feet, though her hands were tied, was quick to gain her feet, and with rare presence of mind started toward her friends.

Red Fawkes, with a mad yell, aimed at her retreating form, but a bullet from Sam Prentiss' pistol dashed the weapon from his grasp.

Seeing that all was up, Red Fawkes dashed for the woods. How he escaped the storm of bullets sent after him was a mystery. But he reached the cover of the woods and all efforts to catch him were in vain. He succeeded in making good his escape.

Once more the villain had showed his hand, and once more he had failed in his desperate purpose. That he had fired the bridge with the purpose of wrecking the train, there was little doubt.

Congratulations were exchanged on the narrow escape of Nellie Borden, and of Sixty Mile Sam as well. All returned to the train and word was sent at once dispatched to Red Creek for a relief train.

This came in due time. Those passengers desirous of continuing their journey were ferried across the river and departed on a train sent up from Cliff City.

The other train was taken back to Red Creek minus the locomotive, and Sam and Nellie, and Ben Dodge went with it.

Considerable excitement was created in the city when the report of the wreck reached there.

Sam came in for general congratulations, and Mr. Borden, half frantic with joy, seized his hand, crying:

"Ah, but for you, Sam, I would have lost Nellie. You have a father's undying gratitude. I shall never forget you."

As for Nellie, she gave Sam a smile and a glance which set his veins tingling with a strange species of delight. It was a novel sensation which the young engineer now experienced. He thought Nellie Borden the most peerless of girls.

In due course of time the bridge was rebuilt and the regular trains were once more running on schedule time.

Sam was at his post as usual. He was always on time, and saw no more of Red Fawkes.

The rumor became current that the villain had gone abroad. But Mr. Borden was not satisfied.

He knew that an immense amount of damage had been done the road by the rascally outlaw. He was determined to have justice, if such a thing was possible.

Accordingly he caused to be posted the following:

"NOTICE!—A reward of \$5,000 will be paid for body of Red Fawkes, the train robber, dead or alive.

"Per order

"OSCAR BORDEN,

"President Red Creek and Cliff City Railroad."

This notice was posted in all parts of the country. It created quite a stir, and a general attempt was made to win the reward.

But this was not so easy done. The wily outlaw was extremely careful to cover his trail so that all attempts to capture him were unavailing.

Thus matters rested for some weeks. Sam Prentiss had begun to fancy that the report that the villain had decamped from the country was not so far wrong after all when a startling thing occurred.

One night Sam hauled the express into Red Creek at midnight, and after the passengers had disembarked Ben Dodge, his faithful mate, said:

"Sam, I'm mortal sick."

"Sick!" gasped the young engineer.

"Yes."

"What is the matter?"

"I don't know, but I'm awful sick. Can ye take care of the engine fer me tonight an' I'll do as much for you."

"Of course I will."

Sam saw that Dodge was ghostly pale and evidently a sick man. All the solicitude of his generous nature was aroused, and he said with feeling:

"By jove, Ben, I'm awful sorry. What can I do for you?"

"Only look out for the iron hoss, Sam," replied Ben, with a weary smile. "I reckon I'll be all right in a few days."

"I hope so. Can you get home all alone, Ben?"

"Oh, yes, good-night, Sam."

"Good-night!"

A strange sensation which Sam Prentiss could not understand was upon his mind, which he would have done well to heed.

He ran the train down to the car house and cut free from it. Then he ran the locomotive up to the roundhouse.

It was a late hour and none of the employes of the railroad were about.

Only one door was open. Sam knew that all he would have to do would be to bank the fires and then make his way home for the night.

Accordingly, he backed the locomotive into the roundhouse and then proceeded to fix the fire.

When this was done he blew off the surplus steam, extinguished the lights and leaped down out of the cab.

All was pitchy dark in the roundhouse. Just as he leaped down a curious presentiment struck Sam. A chill of sudden horror overcame him.

He felt that some presence was near him—felt instinctively the coming of a blow—and threw up his arm. It was the saving of his life.

Against the light of the sky beyond the roundhouse door he saw the outlines of a human arm and a long, keen knife.

Just in time Sam's arm was thrown up, and he grasped a powerful wrist. The keen blade even then stabbed the muscles of his arm slightly.

Instinctively Sam knew that his life was in mortal peril. Death, gaunt and grizzly, hovered over him. Who his assailant was he had no means of knowing.

But with a wonderful exertion of strength he turned the wrist of his assailant and forced him to drop the blade.

"You cowardly villain!" he cried, with righteous wrath. "Now I'll find out who you are, and you shall be punished for this!"

A short, sharp yell burst from the lips of the unknown as he closed with Sam in a desperate struggle.

The contest which followed is far beyond description.

Sam Prentiss was as strong as a young bear and forced his opponent once to his knees, but the other was quickly up and returned to the attack.

Round and round they whirled in the deadly wrestle, not a word being spoken by either.

Now one had the upper hand, then the other, and Sam found that he was engaged in the hardest struggle of his life.

But he was brave and resolute as a lion, and fought with all his strength for the mastery.

Once Sam got his opponent upon the hip and threw him heavily. They fell and rolled over the cowcatcher of the locomotive.

And at this point Sam lost his grip on his adversary.

The other suddenly clutched Sam's windpipe. It was a deadly grip, and for a time shut off the young engineer's wind.

He gasped and gurgled and strove to break that deadly clutch. But it was one of steel.

A fearful faintness seized the young engineer. His head swam, and strange noises were in his ears. Heavens! Was he to die in this fearful manner?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE CAB.

But Sam Prentiss, though he felt his strength leaving him, made one desperate rally.

With superhuman strength he rose and struck blindly out with his fists. They came in contact with his adversary's face.

It had a good effect, too. The grip on his windpipe relaxed a trifle, fresh air surged into his lungs, new life seized him, and he hurled his foe back.

Regaining his wind now in convulsive gasps, he began to deliver heavy blows upon the foe's face and body.

This sort of tactics had the effect of completely turning the tables. More than this, footsteps were now heard approaching the roundhouse.

Sam knew that it must be the yard watchman coming, and he shouted:

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Ay, ay," answered the watchman, and the glare of a lantern shot in at the roundhouse door.

"Come quick."

"What's the matter?"

"Help me to catch him. Don't let him escape."

Sam clutched his foe, but with a snarling cry he broke away. Evidently realizing that his scheme of assassination was at an end, he made a bold dash for liberty.

Had the yardman at the door been more spry it was possible that he might have captured the villain.

But the next moment the lantern was smashed and the watchman knocked over like a puppet.

While the would-be assassin made good his escape in the darkness.

Sam pursued him across the yard and then abandoned it. He returned to find the demoralized watchman just recovering his equilibrium.

Thus ended the attempt on the life of the young engineer.

It was quite impossible to capture the assailant that night, but Sam had pronounced views upon the subject and so expressed them.

"It is the work of Red Fawkes," he declared. "He is still upon my track and seeks my life."

Ben Dodge was very ill, indeed, his life was despaired of. The plunge into the river some weeks previous had caused a chill from which he had not recovered.

Sam could not well do without a stoker, so a notice was posted in the station to the effect that a good fireman was wanted. The call was soon answered.

A dark, foreign-looking man came in and applied for the position. Sam chanced to be in the office.

Mr. Borden said:

"Talk with him, Sam, and if he suits you take him."

"Very well, sir."

Sam turned to the applicant, and regarded him critically.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Baptiste Lavalley," was the reply, with a French accent.

"Ah! have you ever fired on a locomotive in your life?"

"Yes, sir."

"When and where?"

"One year ago, sir, in Canada."

"Ah! You are a Canadian, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, Baptiste, I'll give you a trial."

"Thanks, sir."

Sam saw in the French Canadian before him what he considered a capable fellow. At least he was impelled to give him a trial.

Accordingly they went down to the roundhouse. Baptiste readily demonstrated his ability and Sam engaged him to take Ben Dodge's place.

It now lacked an hour of time to take out the express. Baptiste went to work quite handily to make things ship-shape in the cab.

Sam fancied that his assistant was going to fill Ben Dodge's place fairly well and was gratified thereat. After some errands uptown, he returned to the roundhouse and donned his overalls and jumper just fifteen minutes before starting time.

The engine was all fired up ready for the start.

Her bright work had all been nicely polished, the bearings skillfully oiled and Baptiste stood by the cab waiting for Sam.

"You have done well, Baptiste," cried the young engineer, in a pleased manner, as he leaped aboard.

The new stoker bowed and grinned in a curious manner until his teeth shone white and gleaming beneath his heavy mustache.

Sam opened the throttle slightly and let the locomotive run easily out upon the rails, and then down to the carhouse they ran and hitched on to the train. Some few minutes later the express was on the main track at the platform ready for the start.

"All aboard!" was the conductor's cry and Sam got the signal to go ahead.

With skillful hand he opened the throttle valve and let the noble iron horse plunge ahead upon the long run. Out of the depot they ran swiftly, beyond the confines of the town, and were soon speeding across the prairie.

At a sixty-mile clip Sam ran the first grade. Then a curve was made and the Vulture Hills, far ahead, swung in sight.

Sam sat in the cab window, keeping a clear watch of the track ahead. He was so absorbed in this that he did not notice what his mate was doing.

He did not see the strange glances which the stoker had in those dark eyes of his, nor was he conscious of a startling move upon the other's part.

Baptiste suddenly clenched his hands and set his teeth hard. His eyes held a demoniac glare.

He was now directly behind Sam. With a sudden, swift move he whisked away the long mustache which he wore, and his features were now revealed plainly, and would have been recognized to Sam Prentiss as those of his most dreaded foe, Red Fawkes.

This was all a sharp scheme of the outlaws to turn the tables upon the young engineer. This could be seen at a glance. Sam little dreamed of the awful peril which hovered over him.

The outlaw drew a long, keen-bladed knife from his bosom. He drew himself up as if to spring upon the young engineer.

There was no doubt but that moment would have been Sam's last but for an incident. As chance had it, Sam glanced at that moment into a small mirror against the side of the cab.

It gave a view of objects in his rear, and just in time he saw his peril.

With an awful thrill of horror he recognized the malevolent features of his dreaded foe.

A sharp, startled cry broke from his lips, and he wheeled like a flash. He was none too quick, for the villain was upon him with murderous intent.

Just in time Sam struck up the arm which held the knife and made a desperate blow at the outlaw's head.

The result was at first effective. Fawkes went over like a puppet, but was upon his feet instant.

He rushed in and closed with Sam in a desperate struggle. Words cannot describe the horrors of that combat.

It was for life and each fought with a deadly resolution.

This time Sam was determined to forever settle his foe's fate. He would show him no mercy.

It was an even contest for a long time.

Then suddenly a calamity befell Sam Prentiss. His right foot caught in some obstruction and he tripped and was thrown heavily to the floor.

His foe fell on top of him and a deadly clutch was fastened upon his windpipe. At the same moment, with a dexterous movement, the villain wound a rope about Sam's wrists, and, swinging his arms behind him, relaxed his grip on the windpipe and held the young engineer helplessly bound, a captive.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Sam Prentiss had been in the twinkling of an eye rendered hors du combat. He was not only chagrined, but surprised.

How the villain had so quickly and adroitly managed to thus make a captive of him he could not understand.

He tried to free himself from the rope which bound his wrists.

But Fawkes drew it tighter and with a diabolical grin, cried:

"This time, my fine young engineer, you are mine. You shall not escape me."

"Scoundrel!" was Sam's reply.

There he lay upon his back with his face over him. The train was flying with lightning speed over the rails.

No hand was at the throttle to steady the locomotive. There was no watch kept on the track ahead.

It was a moment of frightful peril. A difficult curve might be ahead, when at the present rate of speed the locomotive would leave the iron.

Or an obstruction might be on the track ahead. Certainly the peril was great with the engine thus uncontrolled.

But Red Fawkes seemed to ignore this danger, and only cried exultantly:

"This is my hour of revenge. Curse you! You are the worst foe I ever had. You broke up my band of men tried and true. You have done me harm, which only your life can pay for. Curse you again!"

The villain glared at Sam savagely. Then a wild, baleful light shone in his eyes.

He sprang partly up and flung wider open the doors of the yawning furnace. A hoarse devilish cry burst from his lips.

"Ah, that will be a sweet revenge," he cried. "Nothing could be more fitting."

Sam saw his awful purpose with a mighty thrill of horror. A hoarse, agonized cry burst from his lips.

"Oh, my God!" he shrieked. "I hope you do not intend to kill me in such a way as that. Help! help! fiend! demon! You shall not."

Sam, seeing that it was the villain's certain purpose to cast him to a frightful death in the furnace, shrieked madly in protest.

But Fawkes had murder most foul in his heart.

His hatred for the young engineer was of the bitterest kind. He seized Sam by the shoulders and dragged him to the yawning door of the furnace.

It was a moment of awful sort. Another instant and the young engineer's career would have been sped.

But fate had not ordered so cruel an end for him.

He was yet to live and accomplish much of noble sort. What seemed like a miracle saved him.

The train was thundering madly down a grade. Suddenly a man appeared upon the platform of the express car next to the tender.

He had a rifle in his hand and aimed at Fawkes.

He was the express messenger, and by good fortune had seen the whole affair through the glass door of the car.

He was just in time.

The rifle cracked and Fawkes threw up his arms, reeled back and fell into the tender.

Sam Prentiss was saved.

He heard a cry, turned his ashen face in that direction and saw the express agent waving his arms in alarm.

Sam understood perfectly well what he meant.

There was danger ahead, and it required swift action to avert it. The train was thundering toward a curve, and at that rate of speed would leave the iron.

Fortunately Sam's feet were free, and he managed to arise. It was awkward reaching the lever with his hands tied behind him, but he did so, and checked the speed of the train.

The engine struck the curve, and it was rounded in safety. Gradually the speed of the train was reduced until almost a dead stop was made.

Sam had been trying to free his hands. The express agent was climbing over the tender into the cab, when Fawkes, whom the young engineer had believed mortally wounded, sprang to his feet.

Before anybody could do aught to prevent, he leaped from the cab, despite the speed of the train.

He was seen to pick himself up, apparently uninjured, and plunged into thick woods by the railroad track. Pursuit was useless, and neither Sam nor the express agent attempted it.

"Are you hurt?" cried Rand, the express messenger, as he climbed down into the cab.

"Not a bit," replied Sam. "But I owe my life to you."

"Well, it was lucky that I happened to see that chap just in time, was it not?"

"I should say so. I owe you a debt I can never pay."

"Don't speak of it. Shall we attempt to chase him?"

"It would be foolishness and make the train late."

"You are right!" cried Rand, throwing off his coat. "Start her ahead again, Sam, and I'll help you out the rest of the way in."

"You are very kind," cried the young engineer, as he opened the throttle valve again and sent the locomotive ahead once more.

Of course the sudden and unexpected stopping of the train caused some curiosity among the passengers. When Cliff City was reached an explanation was accorded them.

The story of Red Fawkes' cunning game, the narrow escape of Sam from an awful death, and the brave work of Rand in the rescue created a furore of excitement.

When Sam once more set foot in the office at Red Creek, Mr. Bordon said:

"Certainly something must be done to place the villain Red Fawkes in a safe place. If he is suffered to remain at large much longer some fearful tragedy will be the result. If caught he should be lynched."

In spite of the large reward offered for the capture of the outlaw chief, none of the detectives could seem to get a trace of him or bring him into camp.

Several times he was nearly within the pale of the law, but each time he very cleverly gave his pursuers the slip.

Sam Prentiss had profited not a little by his experience in the roundhouse that dark night and in the cab. He was

now more fully upon the watch for the cunning foe who meant not to stop short of taking his life.

Fortunately, Ben Dodge was soon able to get back to his duties, and Sam drew a breath of relief.

But the days went by and Red Fawkes failed to show his hand. Several conclusions were drawn, which were that either the villain was lying now for a safer opportunity or had really fled the country.

Ah, few knew the real truth or even suspected it, and that the cunning outlaw was preparing to play the heaviest card yet employed in this dangerous game.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STRIKE.

Even as the distant mutterings of thunder will proclaim the oncoming of a storm, so the hoarse murmur of a mighty tempest of human passions fast culminating now began to make itself heard and felt in Red Creek.

For some time past the yard men and employees of the railroad in general had been engaged in holding secret meetings, and went to and from their work sullenly.

Rumors of an intended strike reached the ears of Mr. Borden.

It troubled the millionaire not a little, and he had endeavored vainly to discover the disturbing element.

He believed this existed in the shape of a few mischief breeders. To choke them off would be the certain means of quelling the storm.

But this it was not easy to do. One day matters came near reaching a crisis, when a couple of delegates waited upon the railroad magnate with a detailed list of their grievances.

"We want shorter hours and more pay," declared the ring-leader of the gang, who answered to the name of Dan Burke. "We want to do our duty, sir, but we want our rights."

Mr. Borden regarded Burke a moment searchingly. He saw him as an ill-tempered, mischief-making fellow, of swarthy complexion, and cunning eyes, which were always averted from a direct gaze.

Burke had been but a few weeks in the employ of the company, yet in that time, as Mr. Borden had good reason to believe, had succeeded in fomenting the present discord and organizing the strike.

In fact, the railway magnate at once singled Burke out as the primary cause of all the disturbance. Satisfied of this, Mr. Borden determined to squarely face the villain out.

"Look here, Burke," he said quietly, "do you mean to say that I do not yield to every man in my employ his just rights?"

"Why don't ye come to our terms, then?" sneered Burke.

"Because they are not just. Every man in my employ gets as fair wages as I can afford to pay. In fact, the first two years of the railroad's existence I kept pay up when I was losing thousands of dollars monthly. Now, this is not fair play. It is not just for the boys to strike at this time and again plunge the railroad into strife and pecuniary loss. We have just experienced a costly siege with Red Fawkes and his men. The men should all stand by me. As long as I live they shall have fair play."

"Humph!" exclaimed Burke, jeeringly, "why don't ye practice what yer preach and give us our rights—more pay and shorter hours?"

Mr. Borden could restrain himself no longer.

"I understand you, sir, thoroughly. You are a miserable, mischief-making wretch. Before you came into my employ there was no trouble. You are alone the author of all this

row, and I hereby discharge you, and warn you to keep away from the yards of this company and let my men strictly alone on peril of the law."

Burke's face turned even a darker shade, and the light in his eyes was murderous. He made a move to draw a pistol.

"Take care!" he gritted. "I don't allow any man to insult me, even if he does run a railroad."

It chanced that Sixty Mile Sam was in the office. In an instant the young engineer drew a revolver and covered Burke.

"Put up your pistol, Dan Burke," he said, in a voice of steel. "I'll back up every word Mr. Borden has said. You are the cause of this strike. Now, you cowardly dog, take fair warning and leave."

Burke's hand relaxed its hold upon the pistol in his own pocket. He saw that Sam had the drop on him, and that the young engineer was in earnest.

He took a step toward the door. The expression upon his face was malevolent, as he gritted between set teeth:

"I'll cut your comb, my fine young cock. You shall feel the weight of Dan Burke's vengeance. Fair warning. I've not done with any of ye yet."

The door closed behind the delegates, and Sam and Mr. Borden were alone. They exchanged glances, and the railroad magnate drew a deep breath and said:

"Do you know that fellow is a deep and dangerous rogue. He looks familiar to me also. Where have I seen him before?"

"I have the same impression," cried Sam, in surprise. "I have certainly seen the rogue before. There is only one course to pursue, Mr. Borden. This strike must be nipped in the bud."

"I realize that," agreed the magnate. "But how?"

Ah, there was the question. It was quite an easy matter to make the statement, but another thing to enforce the rule.

The villain Burke had worked the ignorant workmen up to such a pitch of excitement and passion that no light measure could be employed to stay the impending storm.

But Sam Prentiss was in a determined state of mind.

"I will do it," he declared resolutely. "I will turn the tide upon Burke if I live long enough to do it."

A short while later Sam left the office and went down to the yard. Everywhere work was suspended, and knots of men were visible discussing in a sullen way the situation.

The strike had not extended as yet to the train hands. It embraced only the yard men and section hands.

Sam met Ben Dodge at the roundhouse door.

The stoker's face wore an anxious expression, and he said in an undertone:

"I tell you, Sam, there's going to be heaps of trouble. That Dan Burke has got the boys all worked up."

Sam looked Ben straight in the face. "Do you know anything about this man Burke?" he asked.

"No."

"I wish I knew more about him. But——"

Sam paused. They exchanged glances which were evidently as easily interpreted as words.

"That is just what I was thinking," declared Ben. "There ain't much doubt but that he is one of Red Fawkes' men, and is making this trouble on that score."

"Now, I believe we have hit it right, Ben."

"So do I."

"How will it pay for us to play detective and shadow the scoundrel?"

"I'm with you."

"If we can prove this, we can turn the tide, for those men will never back up any of the outlaw gang."

"You are right. At least, none of the original railroad gang."

"Then you think that there are more of Fawkes' gang working in the yards, and that they are also responsible for the trouble."

"I almost know it."

Sam drew a deep, hard breath.

"It is going to be a dangerous game for them to win," he declared. "But if we live through it, Ben, we will see Mr. Borden set right. What do you say?"

"I'm with you every time."

Just at that moment a gong rang in the round-house. Sam instantly consulted his watch.

"It is time to take the express out," he cried. "How are the fires, Ben?"

"All steam is up, sir," cried the stoker. "We're all ready."

Sam sprang into the cab and donned his engineer's suit. Then he prepared to run the engine out upon the main track, when Ben suddenly clutched his arm, saying:

"Egad, Sam, what's up now?"

There was good reason for Ben's exclamation. At that moment at the round-house doors appeared a half-score of dark-browed men, armed with iron bars, sledges, and other improvised weapons. It looked as if a crisis was at hand.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RIOT.

The appearance of the motley crew at the round-house door, gave Sam a great shock. The strikers looked savage and determined.

Dan Burke was at their head, and shouted roughly:

"Hi, there! Git off that engine! We're the rulers of to-day."

Sam was cool and had kept his presence of mind. He proceeded to adopt the cleverest of tactics.

Affecting not to notice the ruffian, he proceeded to start the locomotive out of the roundhouse.

But just outside the door he saw that the strikers had put a beam across the track.

Of course, this was a barrier apparently to further progress, and Sam was compelled to come to a stop.

A jeering laugh escaped Burke.

"Aha, my fine young engineer," he cried, scornfully. "Didn't work, did ye? Got left, eh?"

Sam stepped to the cab door and said, calmly:

"What does this mean? Why do you oppose the progress of this locomotive?"

"That's a good question to ask," was the reply. "Don't you know that there is a strike on?"

"Very true, but the engineers are not in it."

"That's all right. They ought to be. We don't mean that this railroad is going to do any more business until old Borden gives us our rights."

"Do you voice the sentiments of the strikers?"

"I reckon I do."

"Then they have a poor representative. It is not in your power, Dan Burke, to stop trains on this railroad."

"It ain't, eh?"

"No."

"We'll see."

"Take that obstruction away."

"Haw, haw, take me for a fool!"

"Then order your followers to do it. Will they not obey your orders?"

"They would if I told 'em to do so," blustered Burke.

This was the knowledge that Sam had been seeking. He was quick to take advantage of it

With a swift movement he drew a revolver and covered Burke.

"Hands up!" he cried. "Obey or you're a dead man. I'm a dead shot, Dan Burke."

Burke was truly caught napping. He reached for his own weapon, but the warning light in Sam's eyes restrained him.

With a deep curse he held up his hands.

"I'd just as soon kill you as not, Dan Burke," cried Sam decidedly. "If you attempt any treachery I shall rid the earth of a great villain. Now, if you value your life command your men to take that obstruction from the track."

There was a maddened glare in Burke's eyes. He partly lowered his arms three times as if to act in rebellion. But the young engineer's keen eye was upon him.

The revolver muzzle was on a lever with his heart. A pull at the trigger would seal his fate.

"Come, are you going to obey or not?" cried Sam. "I will give you just one minute."

Burke was in a trap. He knew it well. Life was dear to him, and with a bitter curse he said:

"I'm caught napping this time. But my time is at hand. Take her away, boys."

Sullenly the strikers complied. Sam, however, kept his revolver upon Burke until the locomotive was out of the round house.

Then swiftly he ran out of the yard and on to a siding.

Fortunately the switches had not been tampered with, and it was easy to hitch on to the train and run down to the depot. Ben Dodge opening and closing the switches with duplicate keys which were to be found in the cab of every locomotive on the line. Mr. Borden was on the platform, and when told of the action of Burke was greatly incensed.

"If there is any law in this region I will have it on that fellow," he cried, forcibly. "He shall suffer for this outrage, I vow it."

It was Mr. Borden's intention to summon the police, but at that moment a dull, ominous roar was heard in the direction of the car yards.

The strikers, half a hundred strong, were listening to a harangue of Dan Burke's, and were muttering approval.

Sam foresaw what was coming, and turning to Mr. Borden declared:

"There is going to be trouble, Mr. Borden. I tell you, Dan Burke has those deluded men thoroughly aroused."

"I know it," agreed the millionaire. "But what is to be done? There will be a riot here if we don't look out."

The words had scarcely left his lips when a terrific chorus of yells came from the strikers. In a mass they surged toward the car house.

One of them had a blazing brand in his hand. His purpose was evident—to fire the building.

The spirit of destruction had seized the mob. The riot had begun.

"My God! he will fire the car house," cried Mr. Borden, in agony. "What shall we do? Stop him!"

Sam Prentiss saw that there was only one way to stop the frenzied wretch.

He was dreadfully averse to taking human life, but at present there was no other way but to take the chance.

He drew a deep breath, and covering the wretch with his pistol, pulled the trigger.

Crack!

The bullet went true to its mark. The would-be incendiary dropped the torch and his shattered arm fell helplessly by his side.

It was the turning point which precipitated the battle, but saved the car house.

The shot swerved the crowd like a pack of mad wolves

toward the engine. Sam saw that they were coming for him. "Shoot the scab engineer! Kill him! Down with him!"

These were the cries which filled the air and the situation looked serious indeed for Sam Prentiss.

Mr. Borden saw that the rioters were insane in their purpose and that his own life was in danger. Sam shouted to him warningly:

"Quick, Mr. Borden, jump aboard for your life!"

The millionaire needed no second invitation. He at once sprang aboard the locomotive. Indeed, it was his only move or the crowd were upon all sides.

Sam was quick to hit upon a method of action.

He opened the throttle and let the train go ahead.

In a few seconds they were out of the depot leaving the baffled strikers behind.

It was likely that the mob would now have turned and wreaked its fury upon the depot, and possibly the torch might have been applied.

But at this juncture a squad of armed vigilantes, who had been summoned by one of Mr. Borden's clerks, came on the scene.

There was some firing, quite a sharp skirmish, several lost their lives, and then the rioters fell back.

Seeing this Sam ran the train back to the station. Mr. Borden alighted upon the platform and met the chief of the vigilantes.

"You are having heaps of trouble, Mr. Borden," he declared. "These strikers are as bad as the outlaws."

"Indeed!" cried the millionaire, "I am inclined to the belief that half of the strikers are outlaws in disguise."

"I had thought of that myself," agreed the vigilante chief. "But if there is any means of identification——"

"I think there is," said Sam, with conviction. "I would like to have that man Burke arrested. I feel sure that he is a member of Red Fawkes' gang."

"I will arrest him," declared the leader of the vigilantes, and he started forward as though to execute this errand.

But Sam Prentiss, who knew that he was already behind time, sprang aboard his engine. As it happened Ben Dodge was in the office at the moment.

"Come on, Ben!" cried the young engineer. "This train has not to go through on time."

The stoker was about to respond when a thrilling thing happened.

From behind a corner of the depot a man suddenly stepped forward and threw an object into the cab. Sam saw that it was a square wooden box, and as it fell at his feet he saw the burning end of a fuse protruding from the box.

It required only that glance for Sam to comprehend the nature of that contrivance, and acting upon the instinct and impulse of self-preservation, he made a lightning-like leap out of the engine cab to the platform below. It was truly a leap for life.

CHAPTER XXI.

RED FAWKES ONCE MORE.

Sam was none too quick.

The next moment a terrific explosion occurred which created havoc in the vicinity.

The powerful locomotive was nearly demolished, the tender and two cars were hurled from the track, and a portion of the station platform was reduced to splinters.

Almost instantly the locomotive boiler blew up, and a portion of the depot wall was blown out. Huge pieces of iron were hurled for one hundred yards about.

Sam Prentiss was bodily lifted and thrown violently through the window of the office.

He tumbled in a heap upon the floor beneath a desk.

It was little short of a miracle that his life had been spared. Mr. Borden had been knocked down, as well as other bystanders. The passengers in the train were badly shaken up.

The infernal machine, for such it was, had created terrible havoc. Beyond description was the scene presented.

More wonderful than all else was the miraculous escape of the young engineer.

Had he delayed in his leap a few moments he would have been hurled into eternity.

Sam, upon picking himself up, was face to face with Ben Dodge.

The stoker was tremendously excited.

"Jericho!" he gasped. "What do you call that, Sam? Was it an earthquake?"

"No," replied the young engineer, with a shiver. "I never had a more narrow escape in my life. Some fiend threw an infernal machine into the cab."

"An infernal machine!"

By this time everybody had recovered from the shock, and pandemonium reigned. An angry crowd surged about the wreck. Threats of vengeance were dire and many.

The vigilantes scoured the vicinity thoroughly for some trace of the miscreant.

But he had made good his escape. All search was in vain.

The locomotive was so badly shattered that it would never be fit for anything again but old junk. Mr. Borden desired the wreck moved, but the railroad wreckers were among the strikers, and this could not be done.

However, the strikers were driven from the car-house, yards and depot by the vigilantes, and a cordon of men kept guard over the railroad company's property.

Fortunately it was possible by means of a siding to get another train on the main track, and Sam took the express safely down to Cliff City and back.

After a conference with the vigilants, Mr. Borden decided to print and post in conspicuous places the following address:

To the Strikers:—The President of the Cliff City and Red Creek Railroad desires to warn all honest and reputable men against the evil machination and wiles of Dan Burke, who it is well proven is a former member of Red Fawkes' gang of outlaws.

When it is known to them that their leader is an outlaw, and that it is to ruin the railroad that he is inciting them to strike, it is certain that the strike will die out. Mr. Borden stands ready to keep all his agreements to treat every man fair and square, and to such as will meet him half way he will be a warm and trustful friend. All men now on strike who can see the truth and consistency of this address are invited to come back to their work in the railroad yards before the morning of the twenty-eighth of this month.

Per order,

OSCAR BORDEN,

President.

This was posted in all conspicuous places. Some read and were converted. But Dan Burke's influence seemed so great that it weighed down the impulse to abandon the strike.

Thus matters were when one morning early, Sam, in going to his work, saw posted above these bills the following letters in blood red:

Red Fawkes' Defiance:—The people of Red Creek are laboring under a vain delusion if they fancy that Red Fawkes

has lost his power. Know by this that he is once more king of the Vulture Hills, and that he is stronger than before, and that he sends his defiance to the world. Let all dread his vengeance.

Sam read the bombastic address in intense surprise. He did not for a moment credit the assertions it contained. He was not willing to believe that the outlaw chief had regained his prestige.

But some while later, he was to learn that this was a fact. Secretly, the villain had been reorganizing his forces and entrenching them once more in the Vulture Hills. An astounding surprise was in store for the citizens of Red Creek.

But the most dreadful shock yet was to be sprung upon the agitated populace. Before ten o'clock the same morning a fearful report reached the depot, and caused Sam Prentiss an awful thrill of horror. A dispatch was at the office calling him to the millionaire's home. It was from Nellie, and, hastening thither, Sam was aghast with a dreadful revelation.

The door of Mr. Borden's bedchamber had been forced, and it was discovered that he was missing. The furniture was overturned, and there were signs of a struggle. A long window over the garden terrace was open. Upon the floor a note written in red blood was found. Sam read it with fearful thrill.

CHAPTER XXII.

A TUSSELE IN THE DARK.

Thus the strange note read:

"To Whoever Finds This: Red Fawkes can never be conquered. If anybody wants the old covey's life bad enough to pay for it, fifty thousand in gold will fetch him back alive and well. If not, in forty days he will feel the vengeance of "Red Fawkes."

Sam read this demand for a ransom with indescribable emotions.

There was not a shadow of doubt but that Mr. Borden had been abducted by Fawkes, and was now in his power.

"Oh, Sam!" exclaimed Nellie, "what is to be done?"

The young engineer gritted his teeth.

"Done," he ejaculated fiercely. "There is only one thing to do. This Red Fawkes has the lives of a cat, but he must be hunted down, and the only way to conquer his villainy is to take his life."

With this he went back downtown. People were so excited over the abduction of Mr. Burden that the strike was forgotten. But it needed only a slight breath to fan the flame of public sentiment.

In a few hours the whole town was in a ferment.

The action of Red Fawkes, his very presence, the fact that he lived, was regarded as a menace to the people of Red Creek.

The tide of popular opinion turned.

The strike became as suddenly unpopular as it had sprung into life, and the great hue and cry became:

"Hang the outlaws!"

In this excitement it was suddenly remembered that Dan Burke was suspected to be a former member of the outlaw band.

This was enough for the crowd. The cry was raised to hang him, and a great mob started to find him.

But Burke had vanished, and now there was circulated a truthful report which stirred everybody's blood.

It was clearly proved that Burke was identical with the outlaw, Red Fawkes.

Furthermore, it was clearly established that for weeks past the consummate villain had cleverly been reinforcing and reorganizing his band of robbers until they now far exceeded in strength the former gang. A great sensation was created. Once more a panic reigned in Red Creek.

The Vigilantes did all in their power to track down the abductors of Mr. Borden. But scour the country as they would, not a clew could be found.

The old hiding-place of Fawkes was found, but he had sought new and safer quarters. The truth was there were so many retreats in the Vulture Hills where one could hide that only chance would enable the searchers to find the villain.

Sam Prentiss was the only cool person interested in Mr. Borden's fate. He was calm and resolute, and at once went to work with a settled determination.

All expeditions into the Hills had failed. Sam decided upon a new move.

He secured the services of a substitute engineer to take his place in the cab for a few days.

Then he laid his plans for some sharp detective work. He was determined to rescue Mr. Borden.

His first move was to procure a hand car, and one dark night at the hour of twelve, unseen by anyone, he started down the track.

Alone he rode on the hand-car for miles over the up and down grades until the Vulture Hills loomed up against the midnight sky.

In the pass he came to a halt and lifted the car from the track. Then he turned and climbed the cliff.

Sam's mission was a random one, but he was determined not to return to Red Creek without Mr. Borden if he had to remain forever in those hills.

He was well armed, and prepared for any emergency. For hours he wandered on through the wilds.

The morning hour was fast approaching, and it began to look as if Sam's work was in vain, and the night was to bring him no incident.

The darkness was still intense, however, when by chance Sam struck into a path leading around a spur of the mountain.

In places the path was very precipitous, and below in the inky blackness the roaring of a mountain stream could be heard.

Wondering where the path would lead to Sam made his way cautiously along it. Suddenly and without an instant's warning a dark form loomed up before him, and a guttural ejaculation broke the stillness.

"Durn it! Who's that?"

Sam drew a quick, sharp breath. He was ever quick-witted, and promptly replied:

"A hunter, looking for game. Who are you?"

The unknown vouchsafed no reply in words, but Sam heard a half-smothered curse, and then felt himself seized by strong arms.

What did it mean? Did the unknown mean to throw him from the path? This was beyond doubt.

"Hold!" cried Sam, angrily. "Who are you, and what are you doing?"

"No man can climb this path and return to tell of it," was the reply.

Sam was instantly thrilled. In a flash he comprehended the fact that he had by the merest chance hit upon the possible entrance to the outlaw's stronghold.

It was a reflection of no little satisfaction to him. But the present exigency now claimed his attention, and he saw no way to avert a struggle.

He would have retreated, but the other had a desperate hold upon him.

There was no alternative, and Sam acted upon the wisest impulse, which was to get a hold upon his adversary as quickly as possible.

Then they closed and that awful struggle upon the brow of the cliff was begun.

Words cannot do justice to it. Sam found his adversary a powerful man, and was obliged to exert every tithe of his strength to hold his own.

On the slippery verge of the narrow path the contest was a risky one.

At any moment a misstep would hurl one or both down into the depths below.

Sam soon discovered that this was the purpose of his foe.

Silently they struggled and for a time neither had the advantage. Then Sam's foot slipped on the wet rock, and he fell.

A fiendish cry escaped his unknown foe, and he endeavored to hurl Sam from him and over the edge.

But the young engineer had so excellent a hold upon him that it could not be broken, and the next moment with a wild cry of terror he was drawn after Sam.

Both went over the edge, and hurtling down through the gloom to a seeming death.

Sam did not expect to escape alive from that awful catastrophe. For aught he knew they would fall upon jagged rocks and be dashed to death.

The unknown had a clutch upon his shoulder, which Sam endeavored to break.

But he was unable to do this until their fall came to an end. This was with a mighty splash into the waters of the mountain stream.

It was the saving of Sam's life. Fortunately he struck in a deep pool, and going below the surface some feet, sustained no injury, rising safely after a few seconds.

His first impulse was to strike out and swim.

His opponent he had lost hold of and did not see him again. It was possible that he was carried downstream in the current.

Sam swam about in the water until he found the shore. He drew himself out of the water and stood upon a sort of rocky ledge.

He was under a jutting shelf of rock, and could not see the sky. But at his left he suddenly saw a tiny ray of light, which could only come from an artificial source.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CREVICE IN THE CLIFF.

Intensely surprised, Sam looked at the light and then rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was not deceived.

It was certainly artificial light, and seemed to come from a lamp or lantern of some sort.

It was but a tiny ray, and fell athwart the blank wall faintly.

Yet it was visible, and instinctively aroused Sam's interest. A great surprise was in store for him.

He followed it up and found that it came from a crevice in the cliff. He applied his eye to the crevice and experienced a great shock from the sight which met his eyes.

He saw the interior of a cavern chamber. It was bare and devoid of furnishings save a pile of skins upon the floor.

But sitting in the light of a lantern and with head bowed upon his hands was a man.

Although Sam could not see his face he felt sure of the other's identity.

"It is Mr. Borden!" he gasped. "What rare luck."

So, indeed, it seemed. By the workings of a kind fate Sam had stumbled upon the prison chamber of the millionaire.

So overjoyed was the young engineer that for a few moments he was unable to act.

Then he placed his lips to the crevice and whistled softly. In an instant the prisoner lifted his face.

Sure enough, it was Mr. Borden. The millionaire looked about him in a bewildered way.

"Sh! come here!" whispered Sam, sibilantly.

Mr. Borden sprang up.

"Am I dreaming?" he gasped. "Did not some one call me?"

"Yes," replied Sam.

"Who are you?"

"A friend."

"Where?"

"Come straight ahead," directed Sam. "There is a crevice in the wall here. A little farther and you can hear me plainly."

"Thank God! This is a miracle. Who are you?"

"I am Sam Prentiss."

"Sam Prentiss!" cried the millionaire, joyfully. "What joy is this! You have come to rescue me, Sam?"

"I have," replied the young engineer, "and I mean to succeed."

"How were you lucky enough to find this place?"

"I know not. Fate directed me here."

"But how can you release me?"

This was a question not easily answered.

Sam hesitated a moment.

"This wall appears too thick to easily break through," he replied. "By what means do you enter and make exit?"

"There is an iron door at the extremity of this passage," replied Mr. Borden. "But I have an idea."

"What?"

"A small charge of powder in this crevice will enlarge it so that I could get through."

"You are right. But the explosion will summon the foe."

"What does it matter if I only get out? We can manage to distance the outlaws, I think."

"Of course we can," agreed Sam. "But where is our powder?"

This seemed to dispose of this plan. However, they sat by the crevice and chattered until daybreak came.

Mr. Borden had a thrilling revelation for Sam.

"My boy!" he said, "do you know that every foot of this land belongs to you, and that it will make you very wealthy?"

"What?" gasped Sam.

"You remember the gold claim your father owned in these hills, and which we have never been able to find?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is it, and every foot of this ledge hereabouts is rich in gold-bearing quartz."

Sam was stupefied with the force of this announcement.

"But," he gasped, "how do you know this, Mr. Borden?"

"Well, in the wall of the outer passage is cut the date of discovery and name of the original owner, as recorded exactly in your deed. The truth is Red Fawkes has secretly been working this mine for years."

Sam was completely overcome with this revelation. He felt weak and giddy with the force of the thing.

"Well, that's extra good news for me," he muttered. "Is it possible that I may become a rich man? Well, I'll never forget my friends if I do. But this don't settle the question. How am I to get you out of that hole, Mr. Borden?"

Both seemed at a loss to suggest a way out of the difficulty.

Daylight had now come, and Sam was enabled to see his position with greater ease.

The mountain stream swirled almost at his feet. To the right and left he was shut in by long arms of the cliff. In fact, he was in a sort of break in the face of the cliff, with no other visible way of getting out than to either ford the stream or swim down with the current.

But his whole being was now engrossed with the question as to how he was to rescue Mr. Borden.

Suddenly the millionaire started back from the crevice, exclaiming in alarm:

"Look out, Sam. Somebody is coming."

Sam recoiled and the next moment he heard somebody enter the cavern. It was one of the outlaws, and he had brought Mr. Borden's breakfast.

"Well, old covey," said the fellow, coarsely, "I suppose you'd like to get out of this place?"

"Indeed I should," replied Mr. Borden.

"I reckon the chief expects to hear from some of yer friends to-day in regard to a ransom."

"I would not accept my liberty in such a way," declared Mr. Borden, stiffly.

"Oh, ye wouldn't, eh?"

"No."

"Haw, haw! I reckon ye'd take it sooner than stretch hemp on some mountain pine. Well, so long, old covey."

With a jeering laugh the fellow departed. Mr. Borden came to the crevice quickly, and said:

"If anything is to be done now is the time to do it. There will be nobody in here again for some hours."

"That settles it," muttered Sam.

He seized a heavy rock and began to batter the sandstone wall of the cliff. To his joy the harder granite broke large pieces from the softer sandstone.

"I believe I shall succeed," he cried, joyfully. "See the gap is surely widening, Mr. Borden."

CHAPTER XXIV.

RETRIBUTION—THE END.

This was true. There was every reason to believe that in a short space of time the sandstone would give way to a large enough aperture for Mr. Borden to crawl through.

Sam hammered away with all his might.

There was certainly need of great expedition.

At any moment some one of the outlaws might enter, when the game would be lost.

The suspense was awful.

Never in his life had Sam suffered such mental worry. He worked feverishly and with supernatural strength.

Slowly but surely the artifice enlarged. A cry of joy escaped Sam's lips.

A large section of sandstone cracked and fell out. The next moment Mr. Borden writhed into the outer air.

He was a free man. But there was no time for interchange of happy congratulations.

They were by no means out of peril. To be espied by the outlaws now would mean recapture and death.

"Can you swim?" Sam asked, as Mr. Borden regained his feet.

The magnate's face fell.

"No," he declared.

Here was a desperate situation. The current in the stream was deep and dangerous.

But Sam, nothing daunted, threw off his coat.

"Come," he cried, plunging into the water. "I'll take you through."

Without hesitation Mr. Borden sprang into the current. Once more his life depended upon Sam Prentiss.

And Sam, who was a swimmer par excellence, experienced no trouble whatever in keeping him up, and together they were whirled along through the swift current until the angle in the mountain wall was passed.

Then they reached the shore, and wringing the water from their clothes, Sam cried:

"Come, let us strike for the railroad. I have a hand-car waiting there, and in a few hours we will be in the city of Red Creek."

"I am willing," agreed Mr. Borden.

Together they set out for the pass. It was a hard climb over rough ground, but they soon came to the deep cut partly made by nature in the hills.

Descending the slope to the railroad track, Sam had no difficulty in finding the hand car. He was just about to lift it on to the rails when Mr. Borden uttered a sharp cry:

"My soul! They are after us."

Sam at the same instant caught sight of several dark-clad men not three hundred yards distant. They were undoubtedly of the outlaw gang.

They were grouped together by the wall of the pass, and now both Mr. Borden and Sam were horrified at the sight of an object placed against the wall of the pass.

It was a mighty wooden mast or spar, and was fastened to the cliff in such a manner that by means of pulleys and a windlass it could be lowered up or down.

Several men were at the windlass, and high up on a crag of rock directing their movements was Red Fawkes himself. His loud commands and curses were plainly audible.

At that moment far up the pass came the whistle of an approaching train.

With a cry of horror Mr. Borden started forward.

"Sam!" he cried, "we must prevent it. They mean to wreck that train."

This was certainly the object of the outlaws. But before either Sam or Mr. Borden could make action the train dashed into sight.

What followed was ever after to Sam like a dream. He saw the oncoming train, heard the whistle of "down brakes," saw the engineer's frightened face at the cab window, and then—

Just how it happened it was not easy to say. But the outlaws at the windlass seemed to become entangled, the big boom only partly descended, and swinging awkwardly to the left, swept Red Fawkes from his elevated position.

The outlaw chief was hurled with great force on to the railroad track. The next moment a fearful retribution overtook the evil doer. He was unable to crawl from the rails before the train struck him.

The mangled, shapeless human remains left in the rear of the train was the last of Red Fawkes.

The train came to a stop opposite Mr. Borden and Sam.

Armed men poured out of the cars and a sharp skirmish followed, in which the outlaws were repulsed.

The boom was then removed, the body of Red Fawkes picked up, and Mr. Borden and Sam getting aboard, the train ran back to Red Creek, where it took on two hundred armed men and returned to the Pass, this time to successfully drive out the train wreckers, for their leader was forever gone, and without Red Fawkes the outlaw gang were as easy prey for the vigilantes as could well be imagined.

A great sensation was created when the tragic end of Red Fawkes became known.

Hundreds called upon Mr. Borden to congratulate him upon his escape, and Sixty Mile Sam was the hero of the hour.

The great contest between the railroad and the train wreck-

ended with the death of Red Fawkes, and matters soon became quiet and orderly again along the line of the R. C. and C.

* * * * *

This draws our story near to its end. The exciting days of Sixty Mile Sam's engineering on the Red Creek railroad were now brought to an end.

Of course, he continued to remain on terms of the greatest intimacy with Mr. Borden and Nellie. But his time was now greatly taken up with the opening of his rich gold claim in the Vulture Hills.

In six weeks Sam took out fifty thousand dollars' worth of yellow ore. Then he merged the mine into a stock company, and sold one million dollars' worth of preferred stock, keeping the controlling interest himself.

To-day he is one of the wealthiest miners in the West. Co-operating with Mr. Borden, the line of railroad was extended, and made a great success.

Of course, Sam and Nellie are married, and there is a little Sam, who takes to life on a locomotive as readily as his father.

To this day, Sam Prentiss, the millionaire, enjoys nothing more than to get into the cab of one of his own locomotives and make his old-time run at the sixty-mile clip. On such

occasions Ben Dodge, who is now general manager of the entire system, insists upon performing the office of stoker as of yore.

All are very happy in these days, and often recall, with varied emotions, the thrilling days of the early railroading in that region, when Red Fawkes held sway in the Vulture Hills, and the hero of this story was euphonius SIXTY MILE SAM.

THE END.

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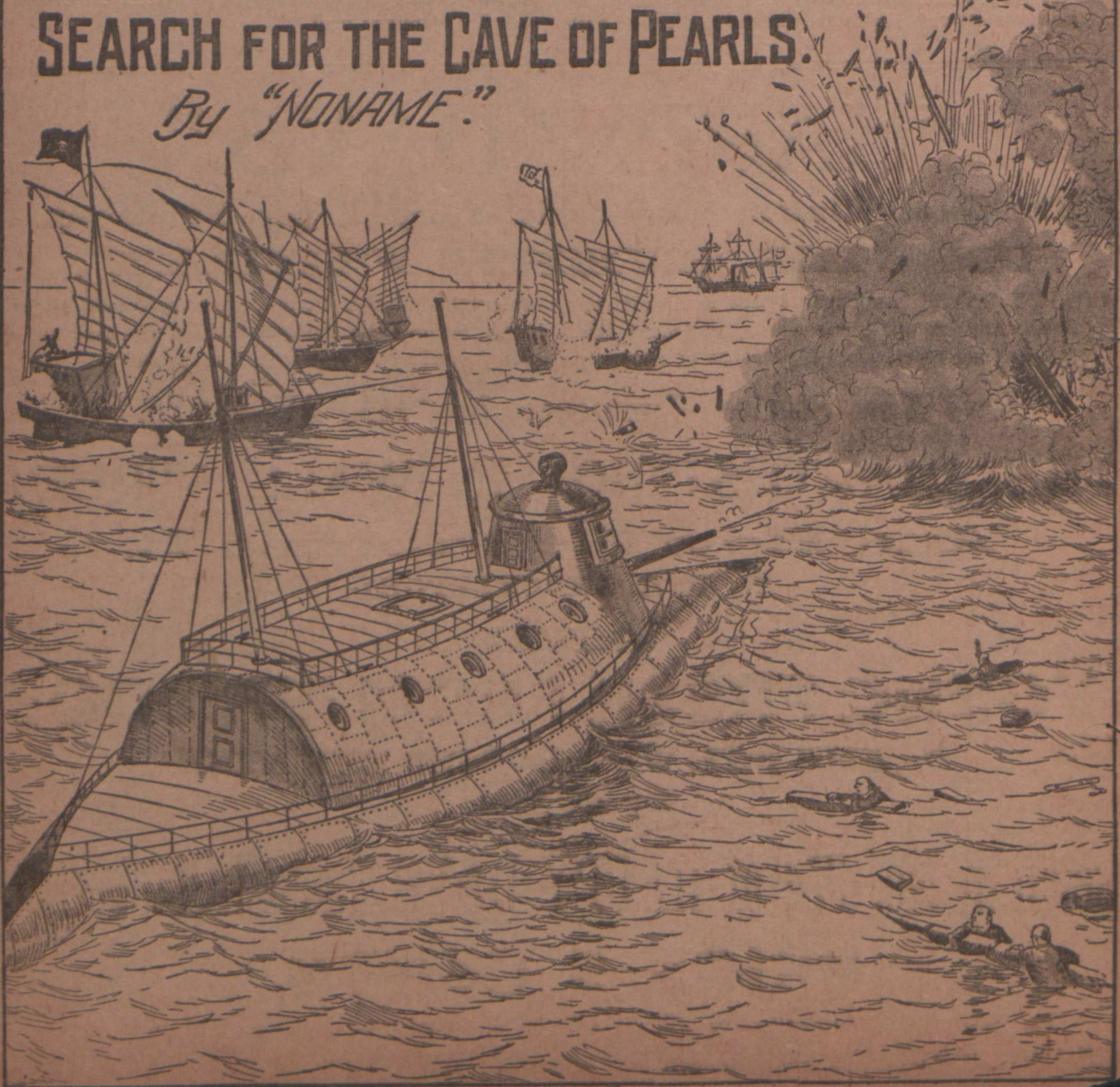
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